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MAGAZINE
INDIA

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September 2015

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Travel for

VALUE

Whether it's eating your way through Maharashtra
or exploring NYC and London, we show you
how to have fun without breaking the bank

QUIRKY TAIWAN

Killer seafood (hehe), a cabbage in a museum,
strippers at funerals... Taiwan is endearing
in its eccentricity

Plus
YOUNG
DUBLIN

FOOD TRAIL THROUGH
MAHARASHTRA

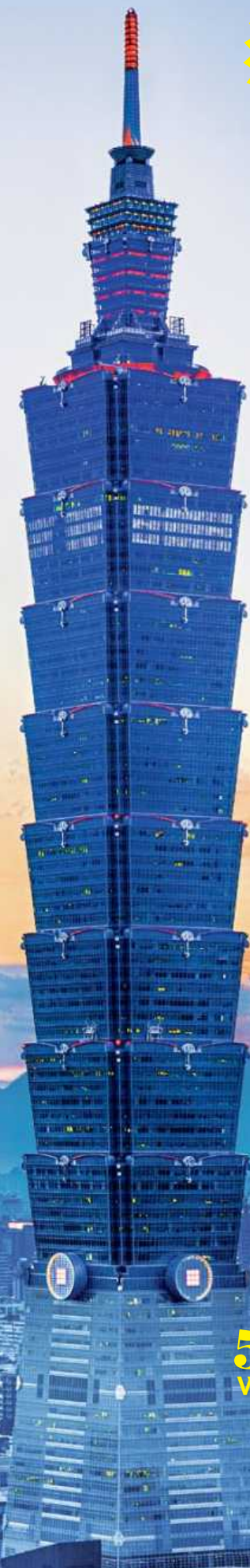
THE WORLD'S TOP CITIES
ON THE CHEAP



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PLUS
5 EASY
WEEKEND TRIPS

VENGURLA
HAMPI
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Lonely Planet Magazine India provides trusted, independent travel advice and information that has been gathered without fear or favour.

We aim to provide you with options that cover a range of budgets and we reveal the positive and negative of all locations we visit.

Because we believe it is important that our journalists experience first-hand what they're writing about and because you require comprehensive information from every corner of the world, at times it may be necessary for us to seek assistance from travel providers such as tourist boards, airlines, hotels, national parks, etc. However, when receiving such assistance, we ensure our editorial integrity and independence are not compromised through the following measures:

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This Month's Cover



One of the 'Asian Tigers', Taiwan is a fun and often bewildering country to travel across, and offers a wide range of great-value experiences.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



Vardhan Kondvikar, Editor

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Do we need to travel?

Most would say yes (especially if there's a free ticket involved), but I've read some interesting counterpoints recently. One is a hilariously grumpy book called *Can't Be Arsed*, which asks why we need to do strange things like visiting Machu Picchu at all. The other, more serious, is an article in *Time*, which says you shouldn't fall for pithy-sounding quotes on Facebook that say money isn't important, travel is, etc. And that actually makes sense: going to Machu Picchu might or might not expand your mind (that depends on what mind you go there with in the first place), but, if you can't afford it, it's stupid to set your mind on it just because some pretty-looking forward on FB tells you to. And just because you can't afford it, that doesn't mean you aren't as open-minded or as knowledge-seeking as someone who can take a year off to 'go find themselves.'

A third thing that got me thinking was that one of my designers, in a fit of enthusiasm, tried an obstacle course while on a photography assignment, and, of course, fell and dislocated his elbow (*see below*). Clearly, not every aspect of travel is meant for everyone, no matter what the "Live for the moment, don't let anyone tell you you can't do it!" brigade says. Travel, yes, but don't leave your brain behind.

So, this month, we've got travel ideas that are huge fun, but not a leap over the edge – big, memorable experiences that won't break the bank or any vital parts of your anatomy. **Taiwan** is like the shy cousin of Hong Kong and Macau: **weird, fun and totally unique**, it'll have stingrays spitting at you and enormous bugs flying in the sky (and will dress you in a tutu). If you're a foodie, you need to spend some time driving around **Maharashtra**, which has some of the most varied and more-ish food in the country, from 'zhanzhanit' mutton curries in Kolhapur to sweet-sour seafood on the coast (and the World's Best Vegetarian Dish).

Dublin is in Europe, so it sounds expensive, but, **young, adventurous travellers** can have huge fun without ever doing anything expensive. And in case you still want to do the big world cities, we have **London, NYC, Tokyo, Paris** and **Sydney** on a budget. And finally, if you're a woman and prefer your travel plans to not include leering men and high blood pressure, our bonus feature on **Singapore for women** should be right up your street.

Trust me, taking your brain along too is better than just taking your passport.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT THIS ISSUE

1. That in Taiwan, funerals feature strippers to attract attention so it looks like the star was more popular than he actually was.
2. That in the Faroe Islands, the (sickening) whale hunt is called the grind.
3. That you can go hiking in Wales with your own, personal sheep. Yes, sheep.
4. That Baloo of *The Jungle Book* fame was probably a sloth bear.



Please recycle when done with the magazine

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KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE

Here's a quick guide to the sections and elements in our magazine, so you can max out your travel experience – and a menu of what's new in LPMI 2.0



Globetrotter Arrivals

The jam-packed Globetrotter section brings you closer to the world through photo features, cutaways, interviews with travel buffs, food and other tidbits, and also offers sage travel advice in the form of Q&As and news on deals and upcoming festivals. **Pg 29**



From fun events and festivals around which you can plan your trips, to cool offers from across the globe and handy apps to make your trips simpler, if it's happening in the world of travel, you'll find it here. **Pg 30**



Anything to Declare?

Every issue, we invite the coolest celebrities and the most intrepid travellers to share what makes their journeys so special **Pg 36**



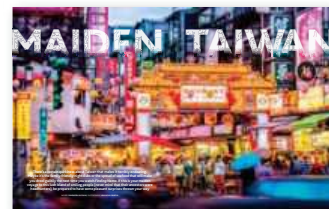
Postcards

This is your section entirely: we invite you, our readers, to send in photographs of special moments on your travels, little events or vistas that struck a chord or made you laugh. Tell us what you were doing there, and how this photograph came to be. Best of all, you don't need to be a professional photographer to be featured here. **Pg 10**



Easy Trips

'Easy' is the operative word here. These trips are extremely simple to plan and head out on at short notice. Typically weekend trips from the larger cities in India, all our destinations are easily accessible. We also have a 'Go Now' badge: these trips are generally seasonal, and often linked to upcoming festivals or events. **Pg 39**



Features

These are our longer, more elaborate stories, which get under the skin of a place. Each feature has a Make It Happen section; a practical guide with all the information you need to plan out this trip. This includes, where possible, the ideal, step-by-step itinerary to best enjoy a destination: take it to your agent, and off you go! **Pg 61**



Mini Guides

A hugely practical set of guides to cities or regions for you to tear out, fold and keep in your bag. Each Mini Guide contains a detailed map, hotel and restaurant listings, a slice of things to do and see, plus other useful info (Indian embassies abroad, currency, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, etc). **Pg 123**

KEY TO THIS MAGAZINE



Location:
Offers access to
the relevant map

EASY TRIPS MAACHLI, VENGURLA, MAHARASHTRA



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Mumbai (552km) is a long, nine-hour drive. Start early to avoid traffic.

Closest city: Panjim (95km)

Closest airport: Dabolim Airport in Goa (116km) is well connected to Indian metros.

Closest railhead: Kudal (KUDL; 22km). From Mumbai, the 12051 Dadar-Madgaon Jan Shatabdi Express is a good option (leaves Dadar [DR] 5.25am, arrives KUDL 1.50pm; ₹ 830 AC Chair Car). Return by the 12052 Madgaon-Dadar Jan

Shatabdi (leaves KUDL 1.56pm, arrives DR 11.05pm; ₹ 825 AC Chair Car).

GETTING AROUND

If you arrive without your own wheels, the property has a car to help you get around (AC Sumo: ₹ 2,500/day/ 250km), and can arrange for transfers too (Kudal Station: ₹ 1,200 one-way, Dabolim Airport: ₹ 4,000 one-way). If you'd like to rent a car from Goa, contact Vailankanni Auto Hires (00-91-9822101598; www.goacars.in; from ₹ 16/ km, minimum 250km/ day for an AC Indigo).



WHERE TO STAY

Maachli: 00-91-9637333284, 00-91-9423879865; www.maachli.in, prathamesh.samant@maachli.in, pravin.samant@maachli.in; Ishavasyam, Major State Highway 4, Manjardewadi, Parule Village, Vengurla, Sindhudurg District; ₹ 5,400 with all meals



WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

All meals are included in your room tariff, and it really makes no sense to look anywhere else. Breakfast (8.30am – 9.30am), lunch (1.30pm – 3pm) and dinner (8.30pm – 10.30pm) are all served in a common area close to the main kitchen. It's advisable to avoid eating in your cottage to discourage ants and other insects coming in.



WHAT TO PACK

Sturdy walking shoes and insect repellent



SHOPPING

Local masala powders by **Gagangiri Krupa Masala Mill** can be found at its outlet in Kudal market (00-91-2362-233011; M P Valaval [Humar Mala], Kudal; fish masala: ₹ 75, mutton masala: ₹ 85). Sawantwadi's traditional wooden toys are great buys too (Sunil Ramdas Chitari: 00-91-2363-274713; Chitari Lane, Sawantwadi; from ₹ 100).



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

The drive from Dabolim Airport is short; use the loos at the airport before you set off.

SAFETY

Maachli has concealed path lighting and a security guard patrolling at night, but it's wiser to stay indoors after dark, except to go down the path to the dining area.



MEDICAL AID

Maachli has a first-aid kit

Above: Kokum on the trees around the cottages

Below: A taste of village life – your drinking water in a tambya

for basic injuries, and the **Government Hospital** is at Parule, 2km away (00-91-2366-269644 00-91-9765209746).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Unless your children are able to entertain themselves without television and other facilities, make this a romantic break. Anyway, the internal structure of some cottages, like Mruga, means that the top of the loo and bathroom are open to the larger room from within, which does require that the guests be fairly comfortable with each other.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Getting to and around Maachli might be difficult for guests with mobility problems.
- * Some cottages are set higher than others; check with Mr Samant while booking if you'd rather have a lower one with fewer steps.
- * After the monsoon, Maachli can organise a visit to **Baban Kumbhar's village workshop** where you can try your hand at the traditional potter's wheel – you can also bring home a clay cooking pot made by him (Oct onwards; from ₹ 50 each).
- * The plantation walk is fairly uphill. The visit to the pottery and the cowshed can be done by car.
- * Mobile reception can be spotty. Ask to use the Samants' landline if you must call.

MAP: RADHA BANACHANDRAN

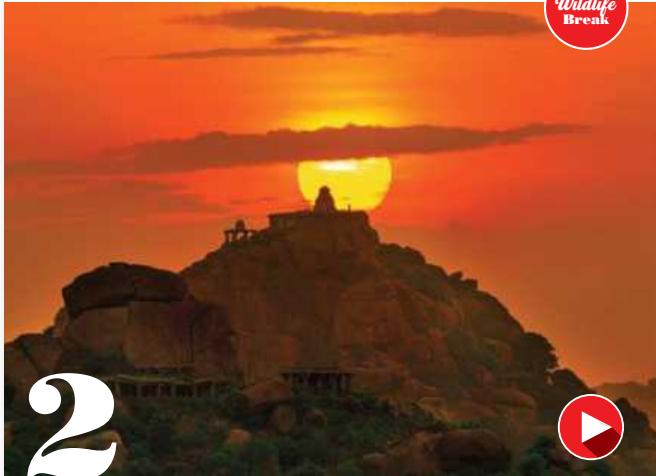


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Indicates that websites
on that page are active



Watch out for more interactivity in the magazine

Whether you've got a travel question or want to show off your stunning photos or insider knowledge of a destination, get in touch at lpmagazine@wmm.co.in.

Wildlife
Break

Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Hampi, Karnataka

GRIN AND BEAR IT

"The bees are buzzin' in the tree, to make some honey just for me. When you look under the rocks and plants, and take a glance at the fancy ants, then maybe try a few..." sings Baloo in *The Jungle Book*. All the signs point to Baloo being a sloth bear – the insectivorous, honey-loving species, indigenous to India. And one place to spot sloth bears is the dedicated **Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary** in Hampi, that glorious testament to the Vijayanagar Empire, known for its spectacular ruins and striking topography. It's a shame that very few visitors come here for Hampi's remarkable wildlife. Daroji's scrub-covered terrain is ideal

for spotting jackals, black-naped hares, mongooses, wild boars and even leopards. The main draw of course is the sloth bear, who usually come out to play in the late afternoon lured by the promise of sugar smeared (just to draw the shy fellows out) onto a story hillock that sticks out of the forest.

It's open all day, but drive over only after 3.30pm, bring a pair of binoculars and climb up to the watchtower. The view is splendid, and it's worth the wait to observe the sloth bears in their natural habitat – their goofy muzzles and shaggy black coats emerging slowly from behind the boulders, curiously poking around. At the fringes of the forest,

Experience an incredible golden sunset from Malayavanta Hill

Hampi Heritage and Wilderness Resort, better known as Sloth Bear Resort, is the perfect jump-off point for both the sanctuary and the sights. The people at the resort have crafted a sensible itinerary for visitors to maximise their time with these creatures. It includes a good mix of natural and architectural wonders. First-time visitors should make the most of the royal and holy enclosures – Hampi's heritage monuments, palaces and temples during the day (entry included in tariff, guide from ₹1,000) (full day). The rest of the time, you'll want to stick close to Mahesh and Venkatesh, the resort's two knowledgeable and affable naturalists. The duo will play a big



GREAT FROM
Bangalore, Goa, Pune

GREAT FOR
Stunning landscapes and sloth bears

GO NOW
While the weather's perfect.

part in your experience, accompanying you to the reserve, answering all your fauna-related questions and urging you to wake with the sun because early mornings are best spent bird-watching. Join them on a jeep safari to the high-level canal and keep your eyes peeled for

various birds of prey, including the cleverly camouflaged Indian eagle-owl, one of the largest of the species with a wingspan of up to two-and-a-half feet!

Then head further down to the banks of Kamalapur Lake with the murky pink-hued backwaters of the Tungbhadra Dam, where the river tern and the Asian open bill stork are commonly sighted. Unusual migratory patterns have seen flamingos and pelicans also making it their home for several months this year. Keen birders will also love the resort itself. Each cottage has its own private balcony surrounded by greenery, so you can pour yourself a cup of tea, take your perch and keep your ears open for the

1. A sloth bear makes an evening visit to the bouldered hillock
2. The stone chariot at Vittala Temple is one of Hampi's most popular landmarks
3. The resort's cottages are rustic but come with modern conveniences
4. Tasty, wholesome buffet-style meals and snacks are offered at the resort after a long day of wildlife spotting

birds. Or stroll towards the back of the property and position yourself inside the bamboo hide to watch flocks of francolin, laughing dove and silverbill feast on millet and splash in the pool of water on the ledge nearby. By evening, make your way to Malayavanta Hill, and stroll through the temple complex. It's only fitting to end a day filled with sightseeing and wildlife-spotting with a quintessential Hampi phenomenon – a dramatic, golden sunset against its breathtaking, bouldered landscape.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS JISHIN PAMAR

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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



DHARAMSHALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH
Little Lhasa

Prateesh Parohit from Odisha recommends a visit to Dharamshala.

What worked: The Dalai Lama Temple was a very different and rather interesting experience. It was one of those places where I felt at peace in the midst of a noisy group of monks going about their endless rituals – a very intriguing sight to observe. Set amid the pristine mountains, the location of this temple amid nature will mesmerise you. Don't forget to look up at the magnificent roof – a wonderful piece of contemporary architecture in a spiritual hub. Don't also miss the Tibetan cuisine, especially the *thupka* (a flavourful noodle soup).

What didn't: The taxi rides around town are on the expensive side.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Although Gaggal Airport (14km; also known as Kangra Airport) is the closest, currently only two flights operate on this route (Air India and SpiceJet), which are unreliable due to the unpredictable weather, and also expensive. Flying into Chandigarh makes more sense as it has better connectivity and lower prices. The easiest way to get to Dharamshala from New Delhi is by train. Take an overnight train to Pathankot and drive down to Dharamshala (85km) from there.



JODHPUR, RAJASTHAN
Fly fearlessly

Mumbai-based Dheha Gahl tried zip-lining and recommends it to anyone visiting Jodhpur.

What worked: Zip-lining, an adventure activity organised by Flying Fox at the Mehrangarh Fort, offers amazing views of the surrounds. Revel in the exhilarating 1.5 hour-long experience as you zip over the fort to get a bird's eye view of the blue city. The trainers are very helpful and ensure everyone enjoys the experience to the fullest. After the safety briefing, you'll practise on a short zip-line, before the actual experience. Two instructors are assigned to every group. At first, you might be a little scared, but once you start, all your fears will be forgotten with the breathtaking view. You can enjoy an aerial view of Old Jodhpur and a part of the magnificent Mehrangarh Fort situated between two water bodies.

What didn't: Check the weather before you zip-line, as it will affect the experience. Also, wear comfortable clothes and closed shoes, as there is a lot of walking involved.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Head to the Mehrangarh Fort by road. Ask at the ticket counter, at the entrance of the fort, for directions to the zip-lining counter. It is located at a walking distance of about 15 minutes from the entrance of the fort. Book online to ensure a spot and also for discounts (00-91-981099939/00-91-71-66-487678; www.flyingfox.asia; 9.30am – 5.30pm; ₹1,400 adult, ₹1,200 child when booked online).

This page belongs To YOU
WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS IN TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here, express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW OR SUGGEST

Mail in your reviews and suggestions to lpmagazine@wmm.co.in

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Video: Offers access to the embedded video or audio file



Email: Invites you to submit your Postcards, letters and reviews

Postcards

WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHAT YOU'VE SEEN





In Kyoto, *maiko* will often spend five years living in an *okiya* (geisha house), training to become a full-fledged *geiko* (geisha)

KYOTO, JAPAN

Memories of a geisha

Springtime in Kyoto is nothing less than magical, with its narrow back alleys, breathtaking shrines and enchanting gardens with cherry blossoms in full bloom. The day I took this shot, I was completely immersed in the sights, sounds and smells of Maruyama Park, the city's most popular spot for *hanami*: picnicking and relaxing under the pink-petalled cherry trees. While I was strolling through the park, a *maiko* (apprentice geisha) holding a paper parasol passed me, and I was lucky enough to have my camera with me. When I look at the picture now, it brings back fond memories of Kyoto and its delicate and timeless beauty.



Eugenio Frasca is from Trieste in Italy, and spent two weeks in Japan.



Kyrgyzstan is a rugged Central Asian country along the Silk Route, the ancient trade route between China and the Mediterranean region

KYRGYZSTAN

Deathly silent

The Cities of the Dead are the ancestral cemeteries of Kyrgyzstan, where the dead are buried in structures that resemble houses. The sites look like cities from afar, but with no living beings. These cemeteries stand in the middle of nowhere, and, as you drive around Kyrgyzstan, you will find them scattered across the country. Also, it is to be noted that it is not a Kyrgyz practice to visit the graves to pay homage to the deceased. They prefer to let them return to dust.



Kausik Saha is an IT professional who travels to experience new cultures.

BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK, MADHYA PRADESH

Lone wolf

I took this photograph on a jeep safari on my first trip to Bandhavgarh National Park. The safari is a great way to explore the place—I spotted several animals and got some interesting photographs. I was extremely lucky with this one; with the wolf walking across, and the moss-covered wall behind providing a stunning backdrop to the image.



Samyak Jain is an amateur wildlife photographer from Indore, MP.



Bandhavgarh National Park gets its name from an ancient fort perched on top of 800m-high cliffs



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POSTCARDS



A World Heritage site, Kaziranga National Park hosts two-thirds of the world's greater one-horned rhinoceros

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM

Oh, deer!

Tall grasses cover a lot of Kaziranga National Park, so the best way to explore it is on elephant back. We set out at dawn, and it was a delight to see the silhouettes of swamp deer, rhinos and wild water buffalo as the golden rays of the sun lit the fog-covered grasslands. The experience is absolutely mesmerising and a must-do while visiting India's north-eastern region.



Sanjay Podder is a regular contributor to the Postcards section.

VARANASI, UTTAR PRADESH

The cover is blown

I shot this photograph along the *ghats* of Varanasi early one morning. Not only does the image beautifully capture life on the *ghats* in the backdrop, but it focuses on an iconic feature of the place – the *chhatra* (parasol) being carried by this man. These flat-topped bamboo parasols have dotted the banks of the River Ganges for ages now, providing shade to those who seek it.



Kolkata-based **Ayan Mukherjee** is passionate about travel and a nature-lover at heart.



The ancient city of Varanasi may look antique, but few buildings are more than a couple of hundred years old



Ranthambore National Park was a maharajas' hunting ground till 1970 – 15 years after it was designated a sanctuary



**RANTHAMBORE
NATIONAL PARK,
RAJASTHAN**
**Tiger, tiger,
burning bright**

I shot this photograph at Ranthambore National Park in June. The day started out hot and sunny, but, suddenly, out of nowhere, clouds started gathering in the sky. Everything turned dark, and it started pouring. This tigress seemed to be enjoying every bit of the rains.



CB Singh is a wildlife enthusiast and an amateur photographer who loves to venture into the wilderness.



Shwedagon Pagoda is one of the most famous pagodas in the world, and is among Yangon's main attractions

YANGON, MYANMAR

Heard mentality

While on a short trip to Yangon, I spent an entire evening at the 2,500-year-old Shwedagon Pagoda. I took some time to observe a group of young Buddhist monks donning pristine pink robes. The monks chanted in unison for about an hour and listening to them was such a divine experience. I caught their expressions when they were trying to come together for a group photograph.



Delhi-based **Aditya Sharma** was recently in Myanmar on a business trip.

CERVIA, ITALY

Flight of fantasy

I am a member of Team Mangalore, a group of kite-flying enthusiasts. We've attended kite festivals in many countries to display our kites, the designs of which are based on Indian mythology and dance forms. One of our kites is in the *Limca Book of Records* for being the longest flying kite in India. This picture was taken at the International Kite Festival in Cervia, and features my teammate dressed in a *yakshagana* costume.



Nitin Shetty is a chartered accountant based in Bangalore.



The Cervia International Kite Festival is held in spring every year, and draws a unique gathering of kite artists from around the world



Istanbul has been known through the ages under different names, the most notable being Byzantium and Constantinople

ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Busking in the sun

While walking along the streets of Istanbul, you will see a busker – a street performer – around every corner. Some of them may be found playing alone, while others may have a crowd surrounding them, gladly parting with their money to listen to good music.



Chennai-based entrepreneur **Pravin Shekar** enjoys capturing people and street views.

PERHENTIAN ISLANDS, MALAYSIA

Now you sea me

My wife and I recently travelled to Pulau Perhentian, Malaysia. The place is a paradise, with palm-fringed white sand beaches and turquoise blue waters. The coral reefs here are home to a variety of marine creatures, including turtles, blue spotted rays and black-tipped sharks. During our dive, we spotted this pair of adult and baby clownfish, reminding me of the movie *Finding Nemo*.



Divik Mittal is a neurosurgeon based in Nagpur.



The Malay name 'Perhentian' translates to "place to stop"



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POSTCARDS

St Francis Church in Fort Kochi, built in 1503, is believed to be the oldest European church in India



KOCHI, KERALA

Art attack

I'm currently pursuing my Masters in public health in Thiruvananthapuram. While on a weekend break, I decided to head out to the much-talked-about Fort Kochi. Walking around the place, which used to be a Dutch and Portuguese colony, I found a lot of interesting and colourful graffiti on the walls of houses. This particular one stood out for me because you always think of Kerala as a very traditional place, and this piece of art contradicts that image.



Dr Lalchhanhima Ralte is a travel enthusiast hailing from Mizoram.



Alleppey, with its vast network of waterways and over a thousand houseboats, is referred to as the 'Venice of the East'

ALLEPPEY, KERALA

Why so blue?

Alleppey Beach has always been one of my favourite beaches in Kerala. And the Alleppey Sea Bridge, pictured here, was once the greatest of its kind in India. However, following years of decay, the bridge has completely fallen to pieces. I took this picture because the remains of this bridge – the pillars and partial frames – look beautiful from an artistic perspective, and I've always loved taking long-exposure shots of water bodies.



Vipul Prasad is a freelance photographer based in Mumbai.

KULLU, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Colour pop!

The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) is in a remote corner of Himachal Pradesh. The only signs of humanity you will see are in a few, far-flung village outposts. Each is no more than a small, huddled group of five to 10 mud-and-wood huts. It was in one such village that we spotted this little girl. She sat there, at the edge of the house, dressed in a riot of colours, sporting pink gumboots and gazing at us with a look of trepidation mixed with curiosity.



Kunal Gupta is a marketing professional who travels every chance he gets.



The 754sqkm Great Himalayan National Park gained World Heritage status in 2014



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POSTCARDS



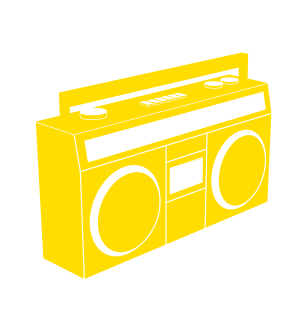
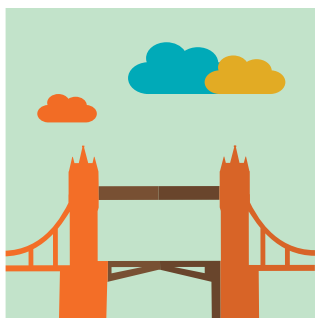
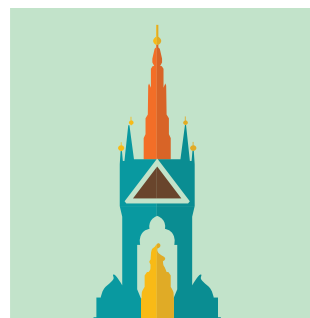
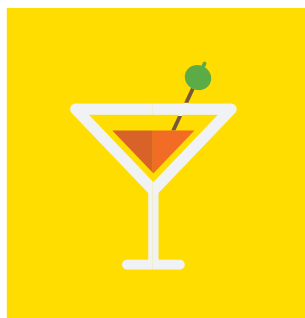
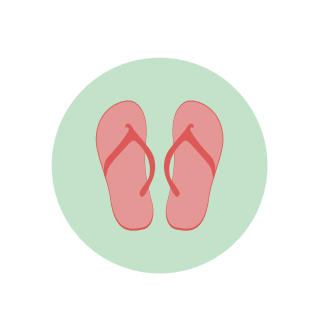
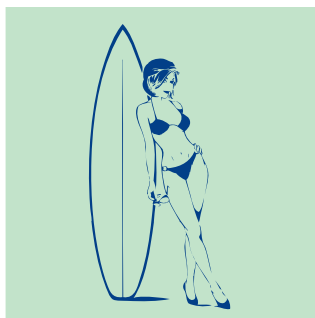
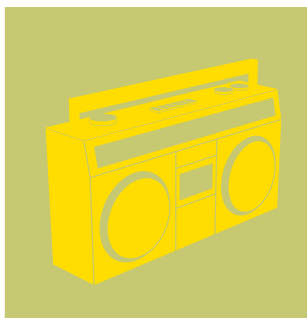
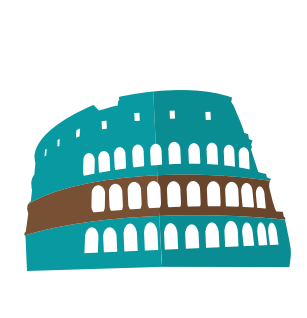
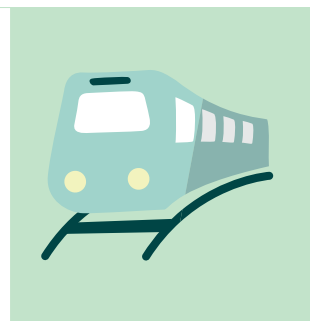
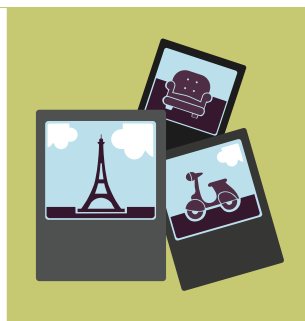
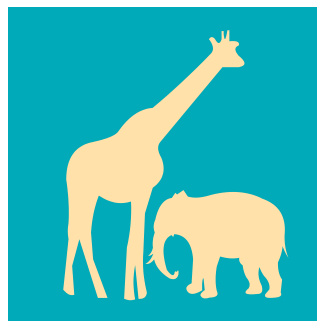
Brij is where you can witness 'laath maar' Holi, in which the women mockingly hit the men with wooden sticks, enacting the role of Radha's friends chasing Lord Krishna away

MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH **Holi moly!**

Holi celebrations are a big deal in Brij. And Holi being my favourite festival, I had to visit ground zero. The atmosphere at the Krishna temple was ecstatic, colourful and joyous. There was colour all around, and, all the while, people were dancing and singing praises of Lord Krishna and Radha. The energy of the place is unmatched.



Delhi-based **Dr Harsh Wardhan** enjoys taking photographs when he travels.





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Your Reviews

We'd love to, but we can't travel everywhere, so we want **YOU** to be part of the *Lonely Planet Magazine India* team. We invite you to send in your reviews and suggestions



DHARAMSHALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH Little Lhasa

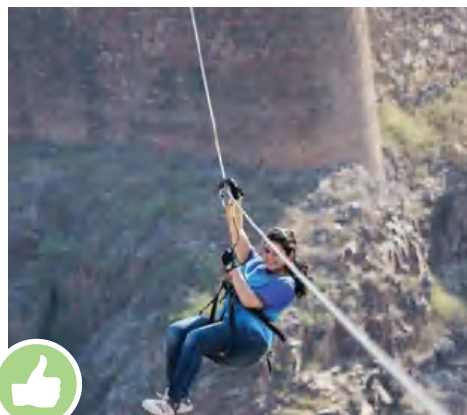


Prateesh Purohit from Odisha recommends a visit to Dharamshala.

What worked: The Dalai Lama Temple was a very different and rather interesting experience. It was one of those places where I felt at peace in the midst of a noisy group of monks going about their endless rituals – a very intriguing sight to observe. Set amid the pristine mountains, the location of this temple amid nature will mesmerise you. Don't forget to look up at the magnificent roof – a wonderful piece of contemporary architecture in a spiritual hub. Don't also miss the Tibetan cuisine, especially the *thukpa* (a flavourful noodle soup).

What didn't: The taxi rides around town are on the expensive side.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Although Gaggal Airport (14km; also known as Kangra Airport) is the closest; currently only two flights operate on this route (Air India and SpiceJet), which are unreliable due to the unpredictable weather, and also expensive. Flying into Chandigarh makes more sense as it has better connectivity and lower prices. The easiest way to get to Dharamshala from New Delhi is by train. Take an overnight train to Pathankot and drive down to Dharamshala (85km) from there.



JODHPUR, RAJASTHAN Fly fearlessly



Mumbai-based **Desha Gehi** tried zip-lining and recommends it to anyone visiting Jodhpur.

What worked: Zip-lining, an adventure activity organised by Flying Fox at the Mehrangarh Fort, offers amazing views of the surrounds. Revel in the exhilarating 1.5 hour-long experience as you zip over the fort to get a bird's eye view of the blue city. The trainers are very helpful and ensure everyone enjoys the experience to the fullest. After the safety briefing, you'll practise on a short zip-line, before the actual experience. Two instructors are assigned to every group. At first, you might be a little scared, but once you start, all your fears will be forgotten with the breathtaking view. You can enjoy an aerial view of Old Jodhpur and a part of the magnificent Mehrangarh Fort situated between two water bodies.

What didn't: Check the weather before you zip-line, as it will affect the experience. Also, wear comfortable clothes and closed shoes, as there is a lot of walking involved.

MAKE IT HAPPEN: Head to the Mehrangarh Fort by road. Ask at the ticket counter, at the entrance of the fort, for directions to the zip-lining counter. It is located at a walking distance of about 15 minutes from the entrance of the fort. Book online to ensure a spot and also for discounts (00-91-981099939/00-91-11-66487678; www.flyingfox.asia; 9.30am – 5.30pm; ₹ 1,400 adult, ₹ 1,200 child when booked online).

This page belongs To YOU

WE'RE TAKING YOUR REVIEWS INTO TWO CATEGORIES

1) A 150-word review of a city, region, hotel, restaurant or activity. These have to be open to the general public – you can't put something in that your father-in-law, the Director-General of Somethingorother, arranged by pulling some strings. If it's a hotel, restaurant or activity, we need contact details and prices. And it has to be in two parts. One: what worked for you. Two: what didn't. Don't be shy here; express yourself.

At the end of each review, please mention: phone details, website address, postal address and relevant rates of the place featured.

2) A one-line suggestion to other readers to go somewhere, see something or do something.

Rules

1) In the interests of verification, we need your full name, address, photograph and contact details (your personal as well as official ones), which we might check up on! Only entries with full details will be considered.

2) We will entertain only serious, factual reviews: this is not the place to plug your brother's swanky new resort, or rant about the horrible holiday you had last summer.

**PLEASE SEND US PHOTOGRAPHS
OF THE PLACES YOU REVIEW
OR SUGGEST**

**Mail in your reviews and suggestions
to lpmagazine@www.co.in**

Letters

Here are your reactions and responses to *Lonely Planet Magazine India*: thank you!

Letter
of the
month



From the heart

You know how, when you're at an airport and there are all these people who look really bored? And how there are maybe, like, three odd people grinning from ear to ear, looking so terribly excited they could pop a blood vessel or two? Well, I'm one of them. No matter where I'm going, or for what purpose, I'm always excited at the prospect of going somewhere. And when my copy of *Lonely Planet Magazine India* arrives at my doorstep, I'm just as excited. *LPMI* is filled with an explosion of beautiful images and articles, and, every time I flip through the pages, I'm filled with the same joy I feel at the prospect of going somewhere. From the remotest corners of the world to the landmarks of the 20th and 21st century with everything possible in between, the words and images in the magazine have the power to rejuvenate one, and fill one with the deepest sense of appreciation for the planet we live on. Thank you so much for putting the heart and soul of the world into your work.

– Nishtha Agrawal, via email

India shining



Every year, the Lonely Planet Magazine India Travel Awards busts one myth – that of India being a country of snake charmers. Indians are on par with the rest of the world because of the exposure they've received. And the credit goes largely to tourism. The testament of this belief is highlighted at the annual *LPMI* Travel Awards in which India has as much representation as other parts of the globe. If China tops the list culturally, Punjab features in it too. If New Zealand offers adventure, so does Uttarakhand. Madhya Pradesh is as rich in wildlife as South Africa, while The Maldives and Puducherry both offer equal serenity to the soul.

– Rajneesh Batra, New Delhi



Dream weavers

I've come to realise that *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is not just a magazine – it is, in fact, a magical contraption that takes you globetrotting

without leaving the comfort of your home. With its captivating pictures and dreamy tales, every page is a portal to a world unknown. It sucks you in and transports you to a life far from what you know and to destinations you can only imagine in your mind's eye. The incredible beauty of our planet and the immense variety of beings living on it never fails to amaze me. And *LPMI* does a great job of evoking that sense of awe every month. Whether it's exotic, faraway destinations or hidden gems closer home, every issue contains a brand new discovery.

At some point, it stops being a magazine and transforms into a thrilling experience in itself. Till the day comes when this city bird can take off and experience all these wonders for real, I'm glad to have the magazine soothe my wanderlust.

– Nidhi Minj, Mumbai



Incorrect information

Being an avid reader of the magazine, I was delighted to receive the August issue, which featured a story on South Korea ('Enter the Dragon'). As I have lived in this scenic country for almost five years, any article on South Korea

brings back fond memories of this country and its dedicated, energetic and friendly citizens. However, I'd like to highlight a few points. Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945 and hence this year is the 70th anniversary of its liberation, and not the 60th, as is mentioned in the story. Secondly, the currency exchange rate for 1 KRW is mentioned as ₹ 17.8, instead of ₹ 0.054. Finally, the Joseon (Chosun) kings were staunch followers of Confucius and, hence, atheists. It is unlikely that they would honour Buddhist culture or Buddhist rituals, which were encouraged by the rulers of the Silla and Goryeo periods, who were the promoters of Buddhism in the Korean peninsula.

– Kaushik Halder, Mumbai

You're right about the currency, it was an oversight on our part. Thank you for pointing out the other facts too – we received this information from what we thought were credible sources. Clearly not!

Editor

Fan following

I saw the coverage of the *LPMI* Travel Awards in the August 2015 issue and was floored. A small suggestion: please have a contest where winners can attend the awards and meet the team.

– Rashmi D, Mumbai

JAZZ BAG, L WALLET, MANHATTAN CARD HOLDER

Engineered from soft, genuine Cow Banjo leather, the uber smart Manhattan Collection from Viari is a must-have for the metrosexual man on the move. The Jazz Bag, with its exterior pocket and well-organised interiors, fits in your tablet or iPad Mini, and more. The stylish L Wallet, on the other hand, is designed to store your cash neatly while the Manhattan Card Holder keeps all your cards efficiently in one place.

For more details on the Manhattan collection, log on to viari.in

The writer of this issue's Letter of the Month wins this Viari Jazz Bag, Manhattan Phone Cover without chain and L Wallet in tan shade. To write in to the magazine, email us at lpmagazine@wwm.co.in



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A ROYAL TRIP FOR TWO TO SAMODE PALACE

Tell us what you think about *Lonely Planet Magazine India* and you could win a break in Jaipur

We always love hearing from you. And that's why we want to pick your brains again – tell us what you love, what you'd like to see more of, and, of course, a little about how you travel, so we can truly make *LPMI* your magazine.

To thank you for filling out this short survey, we're entering all respondents in a prize draw for the chance to win a trip to **Samode Palace**, a jewel in the crown of the Aravali Hills, an hour away from the historic city of Jaipur.

Samode Palace is an exquisite example of Rajput-Mughal architecture, and the stately corridors, the frescoed walls and the majestic audience halls are the perfect embodiment of master craftsmanship.

Be amazed by the breathtaking Sheesh Mahal, the hall of mirrors overlooking the extravagantly hand-painted Darbar Hall. Plunge into the marble-and-mosaic pool, or spend time in the courtyards. Each of the rooms is decorated differently, and the Royal Suites also offer fireplaces, jacuzzis and private courtyards.

Your prize will be a two-night, three-day couple stay with breakfast (www.samode.com).

HOW TO ENTER

Complete the reader questionnaire and send it to: *Lonely Planet Magazine India*, Worldwide Media, The Times of India Building, 4th Floor, Dr DN Road, Mumbai 400001. Prize draw closes at midnight on September 30, 2015. Terms and conditions apply.

The prize is subject to availability and valid up to March 31, 2016. However, the package would not be valid from December 24 – January 2, 2016, and rooms are subject to availability.

To fill out the Reader Survey online, visit www.facebook.com/lonelyplanetmagazineindia.



ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

1. How did you get this copy of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*? (Tick any ONE)

- I subscribe (print/ digital version) ☐ 01
I bought it at the newsstand (i.e. from a shop) ☐ 02
I bought it at a retail bookstore ☐ 03
I read someone else's copy ☐ 04
I read the digital version (on Magzter, Zinio, etc) ☐ 05
Other (please specify)

2. If you are not a subscriber, please mark the reasons behind the decision. (Proceed to Question 4 if you've marked option 1 in the previous question)

- I prefer to read select issues ☐ 01
I prefer shopping for magazines ☐ 02
The postal service is unreliable ☐ 03
The subscription process is complicated ☐ 04
Other (please specify)

3. *Lonely Planet Magazine India* is a monthly magazine. How often do you think you will buy *Lonely Planet Magazine India* over the next 12 months?

- I plan to subscribe ☐ 01
Every/ most issues (9 or more issues a year) ☐ 02
Regularly (6 – 8 issues per year) ☐ 03
Occasionally (3 – 5 issues per year) ☐ 04
Rarely (1 – 2 issues per year) ☐ 05
Never ☐ 06

4. Which method of subscription do you prefer?

- Online, through www.mags.timesgroup.com ☐ 01
Via SMS to 58888 ☐ 02
Through a call to the customer care centre ☐ 03
By mailing in the subscription form ☐ 04
Digital subscription (on www.magzter.com, www.zinio.com, etc) ☐ 05

5. How easy have you found subscribing to this magazine as per the preference listed above?

- Very easy ☐ 01
Easy ☐ 02
Neither easy nor difficult ☐ 03
Difficult ☐ 04
Very difficult ☐ 05

6. How would you rate the subscription service you have received?

- Excellent ☐ 01 Poor ☐ 04
Very good ☐ 02 Very poor ☐ 05
Satisfactory ☐ 03

7. Do you plan to renew your subscription to this magazine when it lapses?

- Yes ☐ 01 No ☐ 02

8. If you used to have a subscription, but let it lapse, what was the reason?

- Subscription is expensive ☐ 01 I prefer buying it from a shop ☐ 05
Content does not appeal any more ☐ 02 Subscription service ☐ 06
Not enough time to read every issue ☐ 03 It was a gift ☐ 07
Lack of attractive offers ☐ 04 Other (please specify)

9. What do you consider to be the biggest improvement that could be made to *Lonely Planet Magazine India* (and why)?

.....
.....
.....

10. How interesting do you find the different sections in *Lonely Planet Magazine India*? Please rate the following on a 5-point scale, with 5 = very interesting and 1 = not interesting at all. (Please tick ONE box per row.)

Postcards	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Globetrotter (World on your Plate, Country at a Glance, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Easy Trips	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Features	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Mini Guides	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

11. Which of the following reasons describe why you bought THIS issue of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*? (Tick ALL that apply)

- I have bought the magazine before ☐ 01
 It was an impulse purchase ☐ 02
 I bought it because of the Lonely Planet brand ☐ 03
 I was attracted by the cover picture ☐ 04
 I was attracted by the cover line – 'Travel for Value' ☐ 05
 To get inspiration for my next trip/ holiday ☐ 06
 To help plan the details of my next trip/ holiday ☐ 07
 There was an article on a particular destination I'm interested in ☐ 08
 For escapism ☐ 09
 Someone recommended it to me ☐ 10
 I saw it advertised in a newspaper ☐ 11
 I saw it at the newsstand ☐ 12
 I saw the digital version on www.zinio.com/ www.magzter.com ☐ 13
 I subscribe ☐ 14
 Other (please specify)

12. What would you like to see more of on the pages of *Lonely Planet Magazine India*? Please rate the following on a 5-point scale, with 5 = very highly valued and 1 = not valued at all.

Indian destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Asian destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
European destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Rest of the world destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
City breaks	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Budget/ affordable holidays	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Places I can go to immediately	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Beach holidays	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Your questions answered by experts	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Practical advice on how to plan your trip	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Adventure sports trips	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Familiar destinations through fresh eyes	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Trips to very unusual destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Luxury destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Food-themed trips	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Places that'll inspire a future trip	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
A sense of travelling, even while at home	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Trips based on watching sports	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Wildlife trips	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
In-depth features	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Photo features	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Shopping	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

13. How highly do you rate the following in a travel magazine in general, and in *Lonely Planet Magazine India* in particular? Please rate each of the attributes from 1 to 5, with 5 = very highly valued and 1 = not valued at all.

	Others	LPMI
Stunning photography		
Practical travel advice		
An entertaining read		
An intelligent read		
Features from travel experts (Stephen Fry, David Attenborough, etc)		
Where to go, when		
Readers' travel experiences shared		
Insider/ local knowledge		
Advice on budget travel		
Advice on luxury travel		
Advice on a range of budget and luxury options		
Being able to enjoy the sense of travelling, even while at home		
Inspiration for trips to take now		
Inspiration for future travel		
Columns from Tony Wheeler and other personalities		
Trips of a lifetime		
Lots of destinations each issue		
Lots of different types of holidays (luxury, beach, city, adventure, etc)		

14. Which countries, regions and cities would you be most interested in reading about in *Lonely Planet Magazine India*?

Countries
 Regions
 Cities

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Please tick ONE box per row)

	Definitely disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Definitely agree
<i>Lonely Planet Magazine India</i> has inspired me to visit a specific destination	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I would recommend <i>Lonely Planet Magazine India</i> to my friends and family	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<i>Lonely Planet Magazine India</i> has directly influenced my holiday plans	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I find the advertising in <i>Lonely Planet Magazine India</i> to be useful	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I am aware of the brands that advertise in <i>Lonely Planet Magazine India</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

YOU AND TRAVEL

16. How do you prefer to travel? (Select your TOP THREE preferences only)

- With family ☐ 01
 On my own/ independently ☐ 02
 With my spouse/ partner ☐ 03
 With friends ☐ 04
 Large groups (15+ people) ☐ 05
 Small groups (less than 10 people) ☐ 06
 With my kids ☐ 07
 Without my kids ☐ 08
 Other (please specify)

17. What are the main reasons for you going on holiday? (Please select your TOP THREE reasons only)

- Adventure ☐ 01 Photography ☐ 08
 Culture ☐ 02 Relaxation ☐ 09
 Escapism ☐ 03 Pampering yourself ☐ 10
 Food/ drink ☐ 04 Sightseeing ☐ 11
 History ☐ 05 Sun ☐ 12
 Meeting local people ☐ 06 Wildlife ☐ 13
 Music ☐ 07 Other (please specify)

18. How busy do you like to be on vacation? (Tick the TOP TWO options)

- Lots of excursions every day ☐ 01
 Just relaxing on the beach/ in a spa/ in the mountains, etc ☐ 02
 One/ two excursions every day with some time to relax ☐ 03
 A few busy days followed by some relaxing ones ☐ 04
 A few relaxed days followed by busy ones ☐ 05
 Lots of pre-planned excursions ☐ 06
 Excursions planned on-the-spot ☐ 07

19. On holiday, you prefer... (Please tick only ONE)

- To stay in the hotel ☐ 01
 To use one place as a base and make day trips ☐ 02
 To keep moving from place to place ☐ 03
 To explore one place thoroughly ☐ 04
 To pack as many places into my trip as possible ☐ 05

20. On holiday, you like to eat Indian/ familiar food...

- All the time ☐ 01
 Occasionally ☐ 02
 Never ☐ 03

21. How important is the hotel you stay at?

- Very important ☐ 01
 It should be a good place with clean rooms ☐ 02
 Don't care ☐ 03

22. What is your definition of a 'long break', in terms of number of days?

- 6 – 7 days ☐ 01
 8 – 10 days ☐ 02
 11 – 15 days ☐ 03
 15+ days ☐ 04

23. For each of the following statements, please rate how much you agree or disagree on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = definitely disagree and 5 = definitely agree.

	Definitely disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Definitely agree
Travel opens your eyes to the world around you.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Travelling is better when you share the experience with other people.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like to go to familiar places on holiday.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like to go to unfamiliar places on holiday.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I am comfortable travelling on my own.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like to have all information in hand when I am travelling.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I am interested in other cultures.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I go away to do nothing but relax and recover from the stress of everyday life.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I see myself as a traveller.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I often ask friends and family for recommendations for holiday destinations.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like to go on holidays where activities are organised for me.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
It is very important that I have a checklist of activities to experience on holiday.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I tend to be influenced by comments/ reviews posted online by fellow internet users.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
When I go on holiday, I only want to eat, drink and lie in the sun.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I use a travel agent whenever possible when organising a holiday.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like to travel and stay in luxurious style.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I have ambitions to travel to many places that are off the beaten track.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
I like the idea of travelling abroad.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

24. In the last 12 months, what was your approximate TOTAL expenditure on holiday PER PERSON (excluding shopping expenses)?

Under ₹ 20,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	₹ 81,000 – ₹ 1,00,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
₹ 21,000 – ₹ 40,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	₹ 1,01,000 – ₹ 1,50,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 6
₹ 41,000 – ₹ 60,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	₹ 1,51,000 – ₹ 2,00,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
₹ 61,000 – ₹ 80,000	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	₹ 2,00,000 +	<input type="checkbox"/> 8

25. How did you book your last BIG holiday? (Please tick ONE box only)

Independently (booked flights and accommodation directly)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1
Through a travel agent/ tour operator (Kuoni, Thomas Cook, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2
Through a specialist tour operator (adventure companies like Clubside Holidays, etc)...	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Through an online travel portal	<input type="checkbox"/> 4

26. Which countries/ regions/ cities do you plan to visit on holiday/ short break in the next 12 months?

	India	Asia	Rest of the world
City/ short break
Long break (4 nights+)

TRAVEL INFORMATION SOURCES

27. How do you select your holiday destination? (Tick AS MANY as are applicable)

Advertisements.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
Magazines/ newspapers/ supplements	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Internet	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Travel agents	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
Pop culture (movies, books, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
TV shows on travel	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Recommendations from friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 07

28. What makes you select one destination over another? (Tick AS MANY as are applicable)

Better reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	Better rates/ deals at the time	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Positive word of mouth	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	Always wanted to go	<input type="checkbox"/> 04

29. How long before a trip (4 nights +) do you begin planning for it? (Tick any ONE)

Spur-of-the-moment (one to two days prior)	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	One month	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
One week	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	Two months	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Three weeks	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	More (please specify)

30. Who has the biggest influence on your travel decisions? (Tick any ONE)

Husband	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	In-laws	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Wife	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	Parents	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Children	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	Travel agents	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 04	Other (please specify)

31. How often do you read the following publications? (Please select only ONE box per row)

	Subscribe	Almost always (3 out of 4 issues or more)	Regularly (at least 1 in 4 issues)	Occasionally (less than 1 in 4 issues)	Haven't read in last 12 months
<i>Outlook Traveller</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<i>India Today TravelPlus</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<i>Condé Nast Traveller India</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<i>Travel+Leisure</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<i>National Geographic Traveller India</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
Newspaper travel supplements (please specify those most often read)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

32. Why do you buy Lonely Planet Magazine India in particular? (Tick ALL that apply)

To get destination inspiration for my next trip/ holiday	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
To help plan the details of my next trip/ holiday	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
To feel like I'm travelling by reading it	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
To read the features	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
To read articles from well-known/ expert contributors	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
To learn about other countries and cultures	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
For practical advice/ tips	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
To look at photography	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
To learn of the travel experiences of other readers	<input type="checkbox"/> 09
Other (please specify)

33. What sort of cover content would be most likely to attract you to buy a travel magazine? (Please tick ONE box only)

Issue themes (Hot List, Travel for Value, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 01	Exotic destinations	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
Lots of prizes/ freebies on offer	<input type="checkbox"/> 02	Destinations you can travel to immediately... ..	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
Indian destinations.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 03	Other (please specify)
Foreign destinations.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 04

34. What sort of cover would be most likely to attract you to buy a travel magazine? (Please tick ONE box only)

A beautiful, deserted beach	<input type="checkbox"/> 01
A beautiful beach with fellow travellers/ locals on it	<input type="checkbox"/> 02
Socialising with local people (view of a market, festival, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 03
Beautiful architecture in a historic city (Rome, Paris, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 04
A beautiful landscape (mountains, jungles, fjords, deserts, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/> 05
One that evokes a sense of going on a great journey (on a boat, road trip or train)	<input type="checkbox"/> 06
A famous traveller/ celebrity (Stephen Fry, Kareena Kapoor, etc) in a landscape.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 07
Wildlife in a landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> 08
One that evokes a sense of eating great food in a beautiful location.....	<input type="checkbox"/> 09
A familiar foreign destination	<input type="checkbox"/> 10
An unfamiliar foreign destination	<input type="checkbox"/> 11
A familiar Indian destination	<input type="checkbox"/> 12
An unfamiliar Indian destination	<input type="checkbox"/> 13
A non-photographic (typography-based) cover	<input type="checkbox"/> 14
Other (please specify)

Globetrotter

A WORLD OF TRAVEL NEWS AND DISCOVERIES

PG 34 Travel Icon: *Tuk-tuk* like James Bond across the world

PG 36 Anything to Declare? In the wake of the whale massacre in the Faroe Islands, Sea Shepherd Captain Sid Chakravarty appeals to your conscience

PG 38 World on your Plate: The Sri Lankan **hopper** is very like the *appams* of South India



Tuk-tuks across the world come with their own distinctive decor. In *Travel Icon* (pg 34)

It's raining frogs!

Researchers working in the cloud forests of south Brazil have discovered seven new species of frog on seven different mountains. They're shown here at actual size; all are under 1cm. And closer home, in Goa, the *Fejervarya gomanthak* has been identified as a new species.

Travel News

Arrivals

CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!

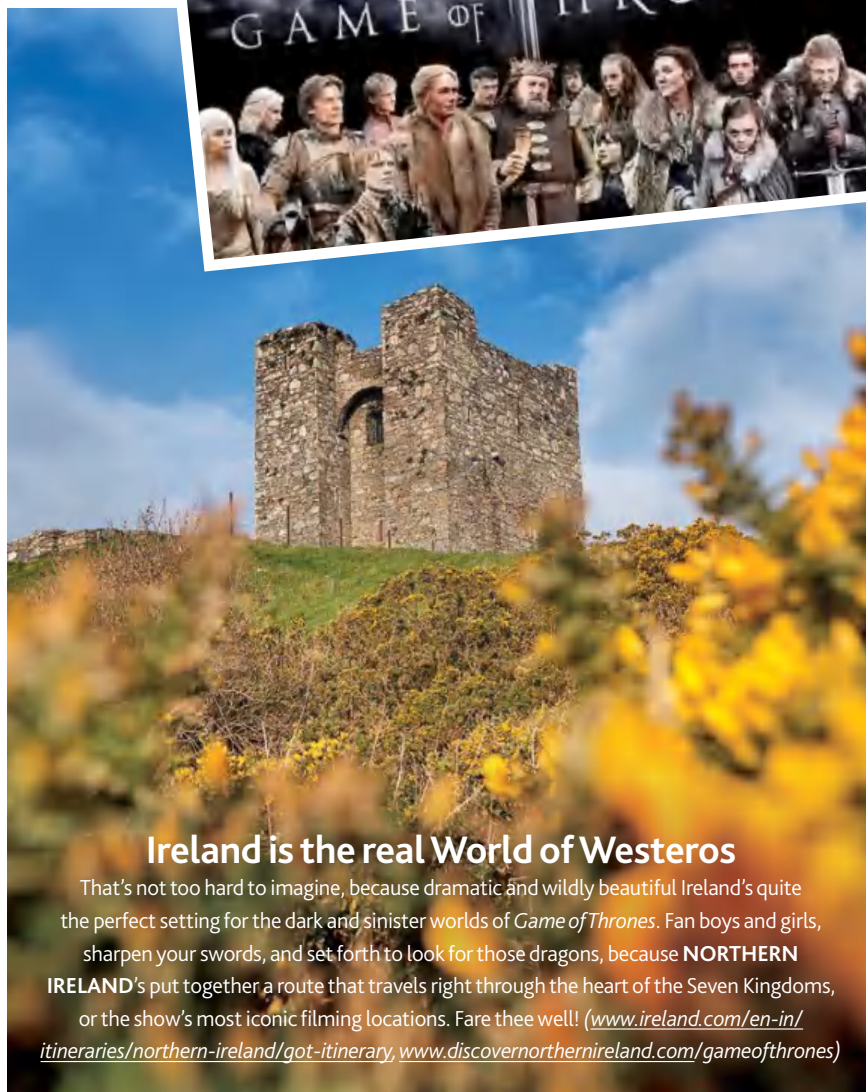


The Edible Atlas

Mina Holland
₹ 599
Canongate

A paperback reprint of the hardcover edition published last year, *The Edible Atlas* is not one of those cookbooks that just dishes out one recipe after another. London-based food journalist Holland takes you on a tour of the world through 39 different cuisines, looking at how styles of cooking draw on local tradition and find place in a region's culture. You learn that yoghurt was a Turkish invention, that the Iranian pilaf is linked to the Indian pulao... Holland also doles out classic recipes, sourced mostly from the people she's met on her travels, and injects splashes of anecdotal colour, cute graphics, as well as words of wisdom from some of the world's food experts.

While we'd have loved to see more on India's cuisines, *The Edible Atlas* is far from disappointing. It would be as comfortable by your bedside as on your kitchen shelf.



Ireland is the real World of Westeros

That's not too hard to imagine, because dramatic and wildly beautiful Ireland's quite the perfect setting for the dark and sinister worlds of *Game of Thrones*. Fan boys and girls, sharpen your swords, and set forth to look for those dragons, because **NORTHERN IRELAND**'s put together a route that travels right through the heart of the Seven Kingdoms, or the show's most iconic filming locations. Fare thee well! (www.ireland.com/en-in/itineraries/northern-ireland/got-itinerary, www.discovernorthernireland.com/gameofthrones)

CHECK OUT THE WEATHER AT STOCKHOLM AIRPORT

And for the weather forecast, we bring you news of a climate portal that should be up and running in Stockholm's **ARLANDA AIRPORT** as we go to press. Step into the weather simulator and get a taste of the weather at your destination, and perhaps even pick up that last-minute woolly or pair of sunglasses. The weather simulator uses temperature controllers, wind generators and audiovisual cues to tell you what you're in store for. Whether it's damp and dreary in London, warm and sunny in Miami, or bone-chillingly cold somewhere up north, you'll feel it all (www.swedavia.com/arlanda).



Llama trekking seems a bit passé? Try sheep trekking in Wales!

GOOD DAY OUT's sheep treks see participants trotting around the Black Mountain range in Powys while being led by a Jacob sheep (www.gooddayout.co.uk; from ₹ 2,500).





GET ON A BIKE

Yes, the Hong Kong Peak Tram offers nice views, but, for really looking around, try cycling instead: the **HONG KONG CYCLOTHON** on October 10 and 11, 2015, is open to riders in all categories. Zoom along the Tsim Sha Tsui promenade, the International Commerce Centre – the tallest building in the city – and across the Tsing Ma suspension bridge, if you're up to it. Present yourself in HK on October 8 for a skills test, then chase down that crispy duck (www.discoverhongkong.com).

VS

HK does not have enough lions or snow or perilous slopes, so you might want to try the **MT KENYA EPIK** from November 22 to 28, 2015, which will see cyclists and runners take on Africa's second-highest mountain. For the fit and insane, the full 'duathlon' includes 500km of cycling past the wildlife, bush and villages along the foothills, then a tough 26km run that takes you 3,040m above sea level. For those who are insane but less fit, there's a 10km Fun Run as well, so everyone can get up close to some of Kenya's best scenery. And lions (www.mtkenyaepik.co.ke).

No headhunters on board!



Following the uproar-inducing death of Zimbabwe's favourite lion, Cecil, **DELTA AIR LINES**, **AMERICAN AIRLINES** and **UNITED AIRLINES**, the USA's three biggest airlines, quickly announced a ban on shipment of hunting trophies, stoutly refusing to accept lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo trophies as cargo. Shout it from the rooftops, we say!



Go champing!

All glamped out? Camp overnight in a disused church instead (www.visitchurches.org.uk; from ₹ 6,500 per person).



Playing statue in Chicago? Listen up!

Visitors to Chicago are in for a new auditory experience. Thirty of the city's historical statues are about to tell passersby a story. Fear not, they won't quite come to life and bark at you as you walk past; rather, you have to swipe your smartphone across a special plaque next to the statue to get a call back from the likes of Abe Lincoln, Picasso or even the lions guarding the Art Institute of Chicago. Called **STATUE STORIES OF CHICAGO**, the public arts programme features monologues recorded by famous writers and performers with ties to Chicago. Hear, hear! (www.statuestorieschicago.com)



Go, Nepal!

Five months after the country suffered a devastating earthquake, Nepal's most popular trekking circuit, the **ANNAPURNA** region, was recently declared safe for travel by a government-commissioned report. We advise you to check the latest news reports before you plan any travel.



AIRPORT CODES

A couple of airport trivia nuts has come up with this very neat – and addictive – website that decodes those mysterious three-letter airport codes (what IATA calls Location Identifier Codes) and their curious back stories. For example, Sioux City in Iowa stoically accepted their code after two appeals to change it failed, even giving it a slogan: Fly SUX. The world would sure be a dull place without geeks (<http://airportcod.es>).

Nerd Alert!

Travel News

5

Minutes with
Chef Laurent
Peugeot

The Burgundy-based French chef who's making waves with his unique blend of French-Japanese cuisine was in Mumbai for a pop-up at JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu

My earliest food memories are of my grandfather and grandmother. Every morning we'd wake up at 6am and pick tomatoes and potatoes from our garden. Later, I would cook with my grandfather.

French and Japanese are the major food influences for me, because, 15 years ago, I worked in Japan for four years. I then started using Japanese produce in Burgundy in France. Diners used to think I was crazy because I integrated the flavour and technique of Japanese cuisine with French food. It was unusual, still is, but it's easier to try new things now.

I see inspiration everywhere I go – in local markets, when I watch people eat...

When I travel, I bring back things like plates instead of souvenirs from different countries for my restaurant. I like to pick up these things from local glassware shops where people usually buy crockery for their homes.

I've eaten so many strange things over the years – scorpions, big spiders, even monkey brain; it's a little like beef! I was in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on holiday, staying with a family. I was served a dish that looked like some sort of a pasta salad. Suddenly, I saw an ant on my plate. I put it aside. As I continued eating, another ant appeared, which too, I pushed aside. My friend saw me doing that and asked why I was putting all those ants aside while eating the eggs – they turned out to be ant eggs! I finished my meal somehow, but today, I'd go back to eat those ant eggs – they were really good! Just try not to think about what you're eating. In Koh Samui I've eaten maggots and really small scampi alive – they're just put into a bag with lime juice, lemongrass, kaffir lime, cloves and ginger, mixed and eaten.

I want to set up a restaurant in Asia – there are so many opportunities here. At 41, I'm not done. My work is my passion. I want to introduce new concepts in food, not just fine dining, but 'bistronomy' as well.

THE WHITE HOUSE LIFTS A HISTORIC BAN ON CAMERAS

Say cheese! The **White House** has just ended a 40-year ban on photography on indoor public tours, so you can get snap-happy, whether you want a selfie with Bill Clinton's portrait or to pretend to be a fancy dignitary in the Blue Room. First Lady Michelle Obama played it cool as usual, announcing the lifting of the ban in a video where she literally tore up the sign that bore the rule.

Selfie sticks and video cameras still aren't allowed, so leave those at home.



GoogleMaps has added **dragons** to its transport options in WALES – sadly, it only works flying from Brecon Beacons to Snowdon (32 minutes).

GO MOBILE, GO GREEN

Finally, air travel in India is set to be paper-free. **MUMBAI AIRPORT** and **VISTARA** have launched the mobile phone boarding pass facility, which is not only eco-friendly but also infinitely more convenient and time-saving. This service is available from Mumbai's T2 terminal to New Delhi, Bangalore, Goa and Ahmedabad. About time, we say, considering even the Indian Railways now offers mobile tickets (www.airvistara.com).





Travel News

Packages



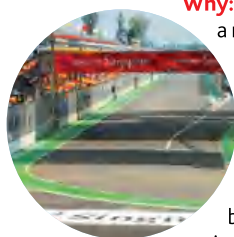
New from Lonely Planet

Lonely Planet India's new digital products include the **ON ARRIVAL CITY GUIDES** series, designed with Indian travellers' needs in mind. Each digital guide, to be viewed on all smart devices, allows visitors to discover the many secrets these cities hold, as well as details on top experiences, eating recommendations, packing tips, transport details, money matters, and dos and don'ts. Affordably priced between ₹30 and ₹60 per guide, choose from 20 cities – Bangkok, Barcelona, Beijing, Bangalore, Chennai, New Delhi, Dubai, Goa, the Golden Triangle, Hong Kong, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Kuala Lumpur, London, Mumbai, New York City, Paris, Rome, Singapore and Tokyo – to have each at your fingertips (download from www.lonelyplanet.in and other platforms supporting e-books).



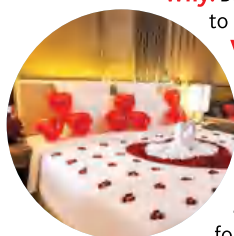
Why: So Junior can pack a punch like Po
Where: Sheraton Macao Hotel, Macau
What: Kids learn kung fu moves from Po at the newly-launched Kung Fu Panda Academy.

Pick from three family-friendly packages priced from ₹12,400, which include benefits like stay, breakfast, lunch, free tickets to the Kung Fu Panda Academy or Dreamworks, spa and restaurant vouchers, and more (www.sheratonmacao.com; till Sept 30, 2015).



Why: Because you have a need for speed
Where: Singapore
What: Singapore Formula 1 night race
What: Kuoni-SOTC's Thrilling Singapore offer includes four nights' stay, breakfast, a half-day city coach tour, airport transfers and an F1 ticket based on 3D Bay Grandstand Category.

The offer is priced from SG\$ 950 per person (about ₹43,600), with check-in on September 17 and check-out on September 21, 2015. Bookings must be made at least 10 days prior to departure, which means NOW! (www.sotc.in)



Why: Because you're entitled to "get a room!"

Where: The Resort, Madh-Marve, Mumbai

What: The offer for honeymooning couples is for a night at ₹9,999/ couple

for the Deluxe Room and ₹13,999/ couple for the suite and includes buffet breakfast and buffet lunch, internet use, flowers, balloons, a cake and a bottle of wine in your room, 35 per cent discount on published tariff (room only) on a second-night stay, a dinner coupon for two on departure, and 30 per cent discount on published tariff on your next visit (www.theresortmumbai.com; valid till Mar 2016).

Five Freebies: Istanbul



1 No trip to Istanbul is complete without visiting the **BLUE MOSQUE** (above). Locally known as the Sultanahmet Mosque, it was built to rival the Hagia Sophia. Gawk at the exquisite interiors, paying special attention to the delicate blue Iznik tiles that adorn the walls. This mosque has six minarets, two more than other mosques at the time it was built (9am–7pm daily, except during prayer times and midday on Friday).

2 Even the most ardent shopper will not be able to completely explore the **GRAND BAZAAR** in a day. Dating back to the 15th century, and with over 5,500 shops, you can pick up everything from Turkish ceramics to Prada and Gucci knockoffs. Bargain! (www.grandbazaaristanbul.org)

3 Take an afternoon nap under one of the many trees at **GULHANE PARK**. Once the outer park of the Topkapı Palace, it's now free and open to visitors. Stroll around or just lie down; this is also a good spot for people watching. If you happen to be here in the months of March or April, you'll find tulips in bloom. An oasis of calm, **YILDIZ PARK** is the perfect place to escape Istanbul's maddening traffic and chaos. This park was once the imperial garden of the Çiragan Palace and is definitely worth a visit (entrance opposite the Çiragan Palace; 10am–5pm Tues–Wed, Fri–Sun in winter, 8.30am–5pm in summer).

4 Take a walk at sunset across the **GALATA BRIDGE** for great views of Istanbul's stunning skyline. Drop into one of the many restaurants underneath the bridge for a really fresh seafood meal.

5 Looming over one of Istanbul's seven hills, the **SÜLEYMANIYE MOSQUE** is one of the finest examples of Ottoman architecture in the city. Built by Süleyman I and designed by Mimar Sinan, the mosque majestically dominates the city's skyline. The terraced garden behind the mosque offers superb views of the Golden Horn (Professor Siddik Sami Onar Caddesi).

A Night in Paris



Air France invites you to come experience a night in the City of Lights. Business Class passengers with connecting flights on Air France or KLM can enjoy a free stopover in Paris with a complimentary night's stay at select hotels as well as transfers by luxury limousine from Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport to said hotel. Valid Schengen visa holders can place a request with the local Air France office at least 48 hours prior to departure to receive a voucher (www.corporate.airfrance.com; till Dec 2015).



Travel Icon

The tuk-tuk

Also known as an autorickshaw, the nimble *tuk-tuk* is found in cities from Bangkok to Bangalore. However, the first *tuk-tuk* is arguably Italian – the 1948 three-wheeled Piaggio Apá was designed by the creators of the Vespa. Since then, *tuk-tuks* have spread across Asia, swerving round corners and puttering at top speeds of 50kmph. More recently, they've emerged in parts of East Africa, South America and the Middle East.

DRIVERS

Most *tuk-tuk* drivers rent their vehicles rather than buy them. Female *tuk-tuk* drivers are rare in Asia, though not unheard of. When catching an unmetered *tuk-tuk*, agree on the price before you hop in.

HOW TO BUY A TUK-TUK

Bajaj is India's biggest *tuk-tuk* manufacturer with its RE Compact (www.bajajauto.com). But before you place an order, bear in mind that *tuk-tuks* aren't allowed on motorways, and some cities have bans in central business districts too, most notably Mumbai and Mombasa in Kenya.

TUK-TUKS AT THE MOVIES

James Bond did wheelies in his Indian *tuk-tuk* in the 1983 film *Octopussy*. Thai cult action movie *Ong-Bak* sees a *tuk-tuk* chase during which six *tuk-tuks* fall off an overpass, five are destroyed in an explosion and one sinks in a river.

OTHER WORDS FOR A TUK-TUK

- Mototaxi – Ecuador
- Three-wheeler – Sri Lanka
- Baby taxi – Bangladesh
- Coco taxi – Cuba
(because it allegedly looks like a coconut)

SPOT THE TUK-TUK

In Bangkok, *tuk-tuks* are usually blue and yellow (pictured). In India, they're smaller than the Thai ones, yellow and black in Mumbai, and green and yellow in New Delhi. Egyptian *tuk-tuks* are often black, and Bangladeshi ones green to signify eco-friendliness.

COMPILED BY OLIVER SMITH PHOTOGRAPH: IVAN NESTEROV/ALAMY

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CAPTAIN SIDDHARTH CHAKRAVARTY OF SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL DRAWS YOU INTO THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST POACHING IN ANTARCTICA

The Steve Irwin, Captain Sid's ship and the flagship of the Sea Shepherd fleet, crossing the storms in the screaming sixties on the way to Antarctica

AS
WE GO
TO
PRINT

Anyone who's had an ocean encounter will acknowledge the unmatched joy of ducking their head underwater or spending a day at the beach hearing the pounding of the waves. We are awed by the oceans because of their unstoppable force, inspired by their sheer size, sustained by the life in them.

I've been on the oceans for the last 14 years. I joined my first ship just four days after turning 18 and, over the next decade, rose up the ranks ferrying timber, petroleum and chemical products across the world. My first shift towards changing the direction of my life came in 2009. I was born in Bhopal in 1983; when I was just 18 months old, the world's worst industrial disaster struck the city. Union Carbide accidentally released a toxic, odourless gas, Methyl isocyanate (MIC), which killed close to 16,000 people instantly and affected more than 5,00,000 people over the next three decades. I survived only thanks to a wind that kept the gas cloud away from the part of the city in which I slept peacefully. On the 25th anniversary of this disaster, I was in the middle of the Pacific on a chemical tanker carrying a cargo very similar to MIC. I had loaded it in the US using breathing apparatus and a chemical suit, knowing fully well that the smallest leak would result in instant death. As I read about the families still awaiting justice for the death of their loved ones, something deep inside me found the idea of working for a chemical company revolting. I had survived 25 years ago; I wanted that chance to count for more.

Sea Shepherd Global is currently in the Faroe Islands, intervening against the slaughter of pilot whales in grinds (local communal drives) on the beaches of this island. Using three ships and multiple ground crew, the aim of Operation Sleppid Grindini is to disrupt the whale hunts by driving away the pods of whales before they can be driven to the beaches and to document and display to the world the hunt that wipes out entire pods of pilot whales under the excuse of "tradition". Seven Sea Shepherd crew members have been arrested and five have been sentenced under unfavourable laws that make it illegal to stand and oppose a whale hunt. The #Standup250 campaign, which went viral and propelled the issue into the mainstream media, was launched to keep the pressure on the EU and Denmark after 253 whales were killed on the day the crew was arrested.

In early 2011, I joined Sea Shepherd Global to be on the frontline of marine conservation. My first mission was to patrol the Mediterranean sea along the coasts of Libya and Syria during the blue-fin tuna fishing season. Four years and three Antarctic whale-defences later, in December, 2014, I co-led Operation Icefish, a campaign that shut down toothfish poaching in the Southern Ocean. Today, my work involves an array of activities related to the ocean that combine ocean policy and law, investigating human-rights abuses, working with various academicians and researchers to study value addition in the seafood industry, implementing at-sea enforcement measures, captaining ships on campaigns and advising governments on cross-border and inter-agency cooperation. I have recently got involved with working with groups on the issue of plastic pollution in the oceans.

There's enough plastic in the world's oceans to be stacked from here to the moon and back – twice! That's an estimated quarter of a million tonnes of non-biodegradable waste. There are over half a million seabirds killed by active fishing gear every year, multiple millions of marine and bird life lost to plastic ingestion and plastic and derelict fishing-gear entanglements. Phytoplankton, which are responsible for three out of every four breaths we take, are now ingesting micro-plastics. The oceans are turning acidic, the coral reefs dissolving. Ocean currents are changing patterns and the ice cover on the poles is disappearing.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SIMON AGER/SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL (MAIN PHOTO), FACING PAGE: ELIZA MURHEAD/SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL (1, 3, 4), CACOMO GIORGI/SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL (2), JEFF VIBERT/SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL (5)
THE VIEWS ON THIS PAGE ARE THE WRITER'S OWN. LONELY PLANET MAGAZINE INDIA TAKES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM

1. An ancient weathered iceberg, reminiscent of an old pillared palace, drifting in the Southern Ocean

2. Two wandering albatrosses wondering

3. A leopard seal yawning on an ice floe

4. Whale hunters in a sea of red at the grind off the Faeroe Islands

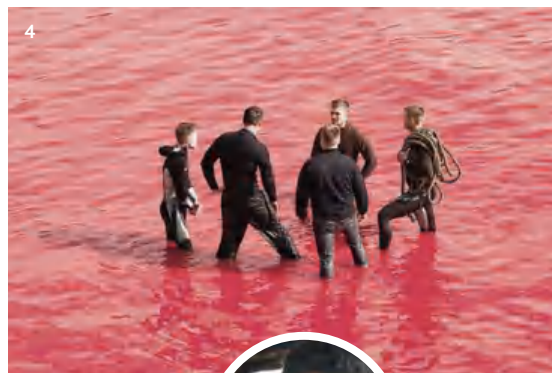
5. Sea Shepherd crew confiscating the fishing gear of the poaching vessel Thunder in Antarctica



2



3



4



5



Siddharth Chakravarty
has been with Sea Shepherd
Global for five years.



SEA SHEPHERD GLOBAL

This marine conservation organisation exists to enforce international conservation laws in the lawless and unpoliced swathes of our oceans. It's been in the news lately for successfully ending the career of one of the most notorious poaching vessels that plied the world's oceans, and because it simultaneously fired the imagination of governments and law enforcement agencies across the world to end poaching in Antarctica during the austral summer of 2014-'15. Operation Icefish saw the longest chase of an illegal fishing vessel in the history of maritime pursuits and the largest confiscation of illegal fishing gear in the history of marine conservation. Captain Sid himself has confronted various poaching operations from the Japanese whaling fleet in the Southern Ocean and the errant tuna fishers in the Pacific and the Mediterranean to the toothfish poachers operating out of Spain and Southeast Asia.

Then, there is overfishing. In 2012, the Food And Aquaculture Organisation (FAO) estimated that 4.72 million vessels fished 93 million tonnes of fish. Break this down to the five minutes it will take you to read this article and that figure stands at 8,75,000 kg. Take a moment to let that sink in.

The other big threat facing the oceans today is from Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUUF) operations. Add to this the human exploitation and the slavery that is rife within the fishing industry and you get a sense of the enormity of the problem.

There are numerous solutions to these issues: reducing waste, avoiding single-use plastic, modifying dietary choices, volunteering at beach clean-ups, participating in education and out-reach programmes, lobbying for stricter law enforcement, enhancing scientific data collections... We need them all because the solutions need to be just as imaginative and diverse as the very eco-system they're trying to protect.

For me, being on the oceans is liberating. Combatting poachers also means that I get to visit some of the most unique and marine-life rich areas on the planet. Having seen the beauty and the abundance of life in these last remaining pockets, I find myself constantly swaying between the extreme emotions of elation and disgust. To see a majestic whale breaching one day and to then see some of them being harpooned a few days later is a good reminder of the importance of my work and why more people need to be able to connect with the oceans and realise the importance of a healthy, functioning marine ecosystem.

World on your Plate

Hoppers

Sri Lanka

KATTA SAMBOL

Using a pestle and mortar, grind together 2 tbsp chilli flakes, ¼ tsp chilli powder, ½ a small onion (chopped) and 1 tbsp fish flakes. Mix in the juice and rind of half a lime, and season with salt and chilli flakes. Omit the fish flakes to make it vegetarian.



HEMISPHERICAL and both crisp and wet, the Sri Lankan hopper is a close cousin of the *appam* of South India. Hoppers are eaten with sweetened coconut milk (*miti kari appe*), *katta sambol* (see box) or with a whole egg broken in.

- * 2 tsp dried yeast
- * 1/8 cup warm water
- * 1 tbsp sugar
- * 1½ cup coconut milk + ¾ cup warm water
- * 4 cups rice flour

- * 2 tbsp sugar
- * Salt to taste
- * Palm wine (optional)
- * Olive oil
- * 1 cup warm water
- * Sugar to taste

1. Sprinkle the yeast over the 1/8 cup warm water, mix well and add the white sugar. Set aside for 10 minutes. The yeast needs to be frothing for this recipe, so start again with a fresh batch of yeast if it is not.
2. Divide the coconut milk into two bowls in a one-quarter and

three-quarter ratio. Mix the ¾ cup warm water with the three-quarter portion of the coconut milk.

Add this mixture to the yeast mix.

3. Combine the rice flour, sugar and salt in a bowl and stir in the yeast-coconut milk mixture a little at a time to make a thick, smooth, pancake-like batter. Add the palm wine if using. Allow to rest overnight.

4. The next morning, heat an oiled medium wok (or *appam chatti*) on medium flame.

5. While the wok is heating, thin out the hopper batter with as much

of the cup of water as you need to get a batter that retains its thickness but pours easily.

6. When the wok is well heated, reduce the heat to low. For each hopper, pour one-sixth of the batter and swirl it around to cover the bottoms and sides of the wok till about two-thirds of the way up the side. Cover pan and cook on low for about five minutes till the edges crisp; the bottom will still be slightly wet. Remove each hopper carefully with a flexible spatula to preserve the shape.

Easy Trips

you can do now



inside

- 1. VENGURLA, Maharashtra**
Spend the weekend going from your bed to the dining table and back at a cosy homestay
- 2. DAROJI SLOTH BEAR SANCTUARY, Karnataka**
Hampi hides a wealth of wildlife in its bouldered terrain, including fuzzy sloth bears
- 3. KOLKATA, West Bengal**
Discover the *hilsa* – a great fish to eat in the monsoon – on a food trail through the city
- 4. UDAIPUR, Rajasthan**
Grab great bargains at three unique stays
- 5. GANDIKOTA, Andhra Pradesh**
Explore the Grand Canyon of India set in a quaint village amid temples and mosques



Maachli, Vengurla, Maharashtra

RAPTURE AMONG THE TREES

It's very possible to simply go from one meal to another at Maachli and consider yours a life well lived. The lady of the homestay could easily make you a willing hostage to her table. But Mrs Priya Samant is nice; she'll allow you to return to your cottage between meals and contemplate your next non-food move. Or contemplate not making moves at all.

Separated from the main road and an outer line of houses by a broad stream, Maachli, in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district, is five cottages set among a working areca nut and coconut plantation that's been in the Samant family for many generations. Inspired by

the hide in which a farmer keeps vigil overnight as he guards his crop from marauding animals, each cottage is an inverted V roof set on a wood-and-stone base in five acres of the 25-acre property. Within each, Pravin Samant has worked with local carpenters to create a cocoon that draws you into nature. The decor is earth-inspired, furnishings mimicking the rust and red of the soil around. Your drinking water is stored in a *tambya* (copper vessel) with matching copper tumbler. In the bathroom, the bucket is a copper *urli*, the soap is fittingly Mysore Sandal but, happily, the sanitary ware is modern

Above: Maachli has five cottages on a 25-acre plantation

Below: Mrs Priya Samant's cooking is to die for

and the shower excellent. There is no TV, no telephone, no air-conditioning – just classic easy chairs outside your cottage in which to while away an afternoon, an evening even, with your eyes, ears and nose following the monkeys, birds and fruit in the tall trees that form a verdant screen between you and the world outside.

Early the next morning, take a [plantation walk](#) (about 1.5 hours) with Pravin's son, Prathamesh, whose experience in hotel management has him brimming with ideas for Maachli's future. Some uphill climbing offers up unusual plants and trees, and sightings of the many species of birds that flit though the jungle eco-system. The flatter





GREAT FROM

Goa, Mumbai, Pune, Kolhapur

GREAT FOR

A break in the midst of nature

GO NOW

While the monsoon makes the property greener than usual.

grasslands reveal two temples dedicated to Lord Baneshwar, an avatar of Lord Shiva. Said to be about 400 years old, and allegedly one of the Pandavas' temples, the older, root- and plant-strangled stone structure is far more

charismatic than its 10-year-old successor. Later, you can [visit a local cowshed](#), and try your hand at milking (₹ 200/person). If you don't like your chances of dodging a kick from the cow, stick to petting the adorable calves and tasting milk straight from the source, fresher than you'll probably ever have tasted before. Or you could wander farther to [Bhogwe Beach](#), a 15-minute drive away (8km), to [Tarkarli](#) for a spot of snorkelling or scuba diving (17km away), or even into [Sawantwadi](#) (40km away), for some shopping.

But always, *always*, make sure you return in time for the smorgasbord that emerges from Mrs Samant's smoky

1. Don't worry about the pots you spoil on the wheel; the clay is reused (see [Good to Know](#))

2. Each cottage is a cocoon of earthy materials and furnishings

3. You can taste fresh milk on your cowshed visit

4. Rouse yourself for the plantation walk with Prathamesh

5. Chivla Beach in Malvan is just one of the beaches around from where your seafood comes in

kitchen. The freshest produce picked from the home farm or from nearby Mhapan market by Pravin, and local seafood from the Konkan coast are transformed into meals served at a rough-hewn table. The fish is delicately *rava*-fried, the clams come alive again in a complex coconut *masala*, the vegetables are a perfect showcase of the deceptive simplicity of Saraswat Brahmin cuisine, and the *solkadi* is always exquisite. Yes, you will be tempted to just go from one meal to another at Maachli, and who could blame you?

WORDS PRIMROSE MONTEIRO-D'SOUZA

PHOTOGRAPHS T KRISHNA PRABAKAR

CLICK TO
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MAPS**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Mumbai (552km) is a long, nine-hour drive. Start early to avoid traffic.

Closest city: Panjim (95km)

Closest airport: Dabolim Airport in Goa (116km) is well connected to Indian metros.

Closest railhead: Kudal (KUDL; 22km).

From Mumbai, the 12051 Dadar-Madgaon Jan Shatabdi Express is a good option (leaves Dadar [DR] 5.25am, arrives KUDL 1.50pm; ₹ 830 AC Chair Car). Return by the 12052 Madgaon-Dadar Jan

Shatabdi (leaves KUDL 1.56pm, arrives DR 11.05pm; ₹ 825 AC Chair Car).

GETTING AROUND

If you arrive without your own wheels, the property has a car to help you get around (AC Sumo: ₹ 2,500/day/ 250km), and can arrange for transfers too (Kudal Station: ₹ 1,200 one-way, Dabolim Airport: ₹ 4,000 one-way). If you'd like to rent a car from Goa, contact Vailankanni Auto Hires (00-91-9822101598; www.goacars.in; from ₹ 16/ km, minimum 250km/ day for an AC Indigo).



for basic injuries, and the **Government Hospital** is at Parule, 2km away (00-91-2366-269644 00-91-9765209746).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Unless your children are able to entertain themselves without television and other facilities, make this a romantic break. Anyway, the internal structure of some cottages, like Mruga, means that the top of the loo and bathroom are open to the larger room from within, which does require that the guests be fairly comfortable with each other.

**WHERE TO STAY**

Maachli: 00-91-9637333284, 00-91-9423879865; www.maachli.in, prathamesh.samant@maachli.in, pravin.samant@maachli.in; Ishavasyam, Major State Highway 4, Manjardewadi, Parule Village, Vengurla, Sindhudurg District; ₹ 5,400 with all meals

**WHERE TO EAT & DRINK**

All meals are included in your room tariff, and it really makes no sense to look anywhere else. Breakfast (8.30am–9.30am), lunch (1.30pm–3pm) and dinner (8.30pm–10.30pm) are all served in a common area close to the main kitchen. It's advisable to avoid eating in your cottage to discourage ants and other insects coming in.

**WHAT TO PACK**

Sturdy walking shoes and insect repellent

**SHOPPING**

Local masala powders by **Gangangiri Krupa Masala Mill** can be found at its outlet in Kudal market (00-91-2362-233011; MP Valaval [Humar Mala], Kudal; fish masala: ₹ 75, mutton masala: ₹ 85). Sawantwadi's traditional wooden toys are great buys too (Sunil Ramdas Chitari: 00-91-2363-274713; Chitari Lane, Sawantwadi; from ₹ 100).

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

The drive from Dabolim Airport is short; use the loos at the airport before you set off.

SAFETY

Maachli has concealed path lighting and a security guard patrolling at night, but it's wiser to stay indoors after dark, except to go down the path to the dining area.

**MEDICAL AID**

Maachli has a first-aid kit

Above: Kokum on the trees around the cottages

Below: A taste of village life – your drinking water in a tambya

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Getting to and around Maachli might be difficult for guests with mobility problems.
- * Some cottages are set higher than others; check with Mr Samant while booking if you'd rather have a lower one with fewer steps.
- * After the monsoon, Maachli can organise a visit to **Baban Kumbhar's village workshop** where you can try your hand at the traditional potter's wheel – you can also bring home a clay cooking pot made by him (Oct onwards; from ₹ 50 each).
- * The plantation walk is fairly uphill. The visit to the pottery and the cowshed can be done by car.
- * Mobile reception can be spotty. Ask to use the Samants' landline if you must call.



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2

Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Hampi, Karnataka

GRIN AND BEAR IT

"The bees are buzzin' in the tree, to make some honey just for me. When you look under the rocks and plants, and take a glance at the fancy ants, then maybe try a few..." sings Baloo in *The Jungle Book*.

All the signs point to Baloo being a sloth bear – the insectivorous, honey-loving species, indigenous to India. And one place to spot sloth bears is the dedicated [Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary](#) in Hampi, that glorious testament to the Vijayanagar Empire, known for its spectacular ruins and striking topography.

It's a shame that very few visitors come here for Hampi's remarkable wildlife. Daroji's scrub-covered terrain is ideal

for spotting jackals, black-naped hares, mongoose, wild boars and even leopards. The main draw of course is the sloth bears, who usually come out to play in the late afternoon lured by the promise of sugar smeared (just to draw the shy fellows out) onto a stony hillock that sticks out of the forest.

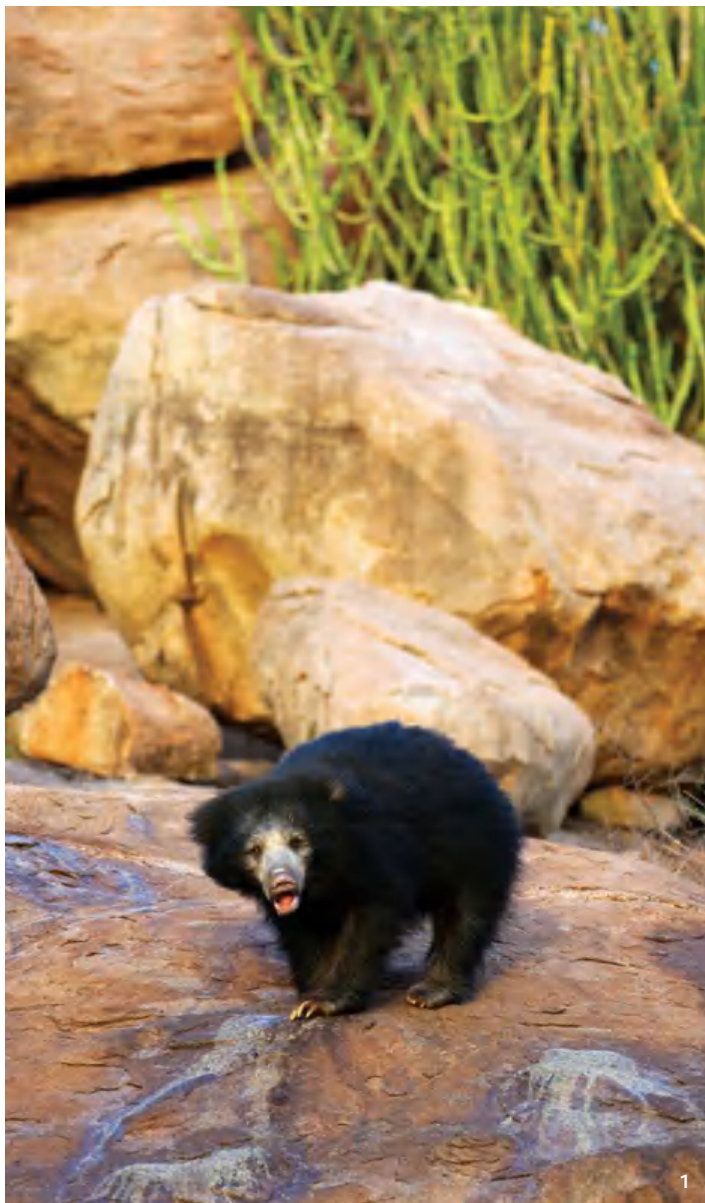
It's open all day, but drive over only after 3.30pm, bring a pair of binoculars and climb up to the watchtower. The view is splendid, and it's worth the wait to observe the sloth bears in their natural habitat – their goofy muzzles and shaggy black coats emerging slowly from behind the boulders, curiously poking around.

At the fringes of the forest,

Experience an incredible golden sunset from Malyavanta Hill

[Hampi Heritage and Wilderness Resort](#), better known as Sloth Bear Resort, is the perfect jump-off point for both the sanctuary and the sights. The people at the resort have crafted a sensible itinerary for visitors to maximise their time with these creatures. It includes a good mix of natural and architectural wonders. First-time visitors should make the most of the royal and holy enclosures – Hampi's heritage monuments, palaces and temples during the day (*entry included in tariff, guide from ₹ 1,000/ full day*).

The rest of the time, you'll want to stick close to Mahesh and Venkatesh, the resort's two knowledgeable and affable naturalists. The duo will play a big



GREAT FROM

Bangalore, Goa, Pune

GREAT FOR

Stunning landscapes and sloth bears

GO NOW

While the weather's perfect.

part in your experience, accompanying you to the reserve, answering all your fauna-related questions and urging you to wake with the sun because early mornings are best spent bird-watching. Join them on a jeep safari to the high-level canal and keep your eyes peeled for

various birds of prey, including the cleverly camouflaged Indian eagle owl, one of the largest of the species with a wingspan of upto two-and-a-half feet!

Then head further down to the banks of **Kamalapur Lake** with the murky pink-hued backwaters of the Tungabhadra Dam, where the river tern and the Asian open bill stork are commonly sighted. Unusual migratory patterns have seen flamingos and pelicans also making it their home for several months this year.

Keen birders will also love the resort itself. Each cottage has its own private balcony surrounded by greenery, so you can pour yourself a cup of tea, take your perch and keep your ears open for the

1. A sloth bear makes an evening visit to the bouldered hillock

2. The stone chariot at Vitthala Temple is one of Hampi's most popular landmarks

3. The resort's cottages are rustic but come with modern conveniences

4. Tasty, wholesome buffet-style meals and snacks are offered at the resort after a long day of wildlife spotting

birds. Or stroll towards the back of the property and position yourself inside the bamboo hide to watch flocks of francolin, laughing dove and silverbill feast on millet and splash in the pool of water on the ledge nearby.

By evening, make your way to **Malyavanta Hill**, and stroll through the temple complex. It's only fitting to end a day filled with sightseeing and wildlife-spotting with a quintessential Hampi phenomenon – a dramatic, golden sunset against its breathtaking, bouldered landscape.

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS ASHISH PARMAR



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (340km) is eight hours away.

Closest airport: Hubli Airport (170km) services direct flights from Bangalore on Air Pegasus (return fares from ₹ 5,150). Bangalore's Kempegowda International Airport (340km) is well connected to most Indian metros (return fares from ₹ 4,000).

Closest railhead: Hospet Junction (HPT; 14km). The daily 16592 Hampi Express is a good option between Bangalore and Hospet (leaves Bangalore City [SBC] 10pm, arrives HPT 7.10am; ₹ 660 Third AC).

Return by the 16591 Hampi Express (leaves HPT 9.05pm, arrives SBC 6.10am; ₹ 660 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

It's best to have your own transport if you would like to explore on your own. You can catch an autorickshaw from the station but make sure you decide on a fair price beforehand. There are privately-run stalls in Hampi bazaar renting out mopeds and motorbikes (from ₹ 150/ day). We drove down from Bangalore using the services of Travelzone (00-91-9980222022; anthony.travelzone@gmail.com; from ₹ 3,500/ day for an AC sedan).

WHERE TO STAY

Hampi Heritage and Wilderness Resort: Open year round, this sprawling eco-friendly property by Jungle Lodges & Resorts offers 22 air-conditioned cottages spread across its 33 acres. Rooms are spacious, fitted with twin beds and simple wood and cane furnishings and come with a porch (00-91-9482053354; www.junglelodges.com; info@junglelodges.com; near Kannada University, PK Halli Rd, Kamalapur, Hospet; cottages from ₹ 8,014 with all meals, a tour of Hampi's sights, a visit to the sanctuary, get a 20 per cent monsoon discount valid till September 15, 2015, if you book online).

WHERE TO EAT

There's no need to venture into the main town; the resort provides

three buffet-style meals a day in the dining hall. Expect tasty vegetarian and non-vegetarian fare that includes Indian, Chinese and continental dishes on the daily-changing menu. They also offer morning coffee and biscuits for early risers, and *bhajias* for tea.

WHAT TO PACK

Comfy walking shoes, clothing in muted colours, a hat, a torch, sunscreen, sunglasses, mosquito repellent, a camera and binoculars (you can also borrow the resort's pair)

SHOPPING

There isn't much to buy in Hampi. If you're visiting the main Vitthala Temple, keep an eye out for small make-shift stalls selling stone carvings by local artisans (from ₹ 200 for a small sculpture).

If you're lucky, you might spot the majestic Indian eagle owl at the high-level canal



CLEAN LOO GUIDE

If you're driving to and from Bangalore, the toilets at **Kamat Restaurant** on Tumkur Road or the VRL checkpoint at Vasanta Narasapura Village are well maintained.

SAFETY

Don't venture into the restricted areas without special permission and an accompanying guide.

MEDICAL AID

Abhishek Hospital in nearby Hospet is equipped to handle any emergencies (00-91-8394227666; near Vijayanagar College, Basaveshwar Badavane).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Kids will love Hampi for its wildlife and bird-watching activities and open spaces, but keep an eye on them at all times.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * Carry cash as cards are rarely accepted, if at all. The nearest ATM is in Hospet (about 14km).
- * Avoid wearing strong fragrances on sanctuary visits.
- * As this is a natural habitat, sightings of the sloth bears are not guaranteed.
- * Phone and data connectivity can be low in some areas in Hampi. There is no wi-fi at the resort.
- * July to March is the best time to visit Hampi as summers can be very hot.

SOMETIMES, A CAMERA ONLY COMES IN THE WAY.



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Food trail through Kolkata, West Bengal

OH FISH!

Nothing stands in the way of *ilish* during the monsoon – not pouring rain, nor public holidays or rallies. When the air is heavy with moisture and the rivers are swollen, it's time to sink your teeth into the tender, greasy *ilish maachh bhaja*, or fried *hilsa*. As the juices flood your mouth and the tingling mustard shoots up your nose, you realise what the fuss is all about.

Laden with oil and juices, the *hilsa* has a unique flavour and inventive Bengalis have dreamed up and perfected a million mouth-smacking ways to eat it. The annual *hilsa* festival at [Tero Parbon](#) restaurant (see *Where to Eat for all details*) devotes the entire monsoon season to this

fish, with a menu that features a staggering 46 different preparations. The attentive waiters at this lively family restaurant will coax you to liberally sprinkle your food with *ilish tel*, or *hilsa* oil, and try *narkal poshto ilish* – *hilsa* cooked in a thick coconut and poppy-seed gravy (₹ 290) and *ilish tel masala bhaja* – fried *hilsa* (₹ 250/ piece).

You'll quickly learn the subtleties of eating *ilish*, Bengali style. The proper way to eat the *ilish* curry rice (₹ 185) at the no-frills [Adarsha Hindu Hotel](#) is to simply dig in with your fingers. Squeeze the fish, mix it with rice, roll into morsels, pop into

Above: [Apanjan's fish kabiraji](#) tastes best with the tingling mustard sauce

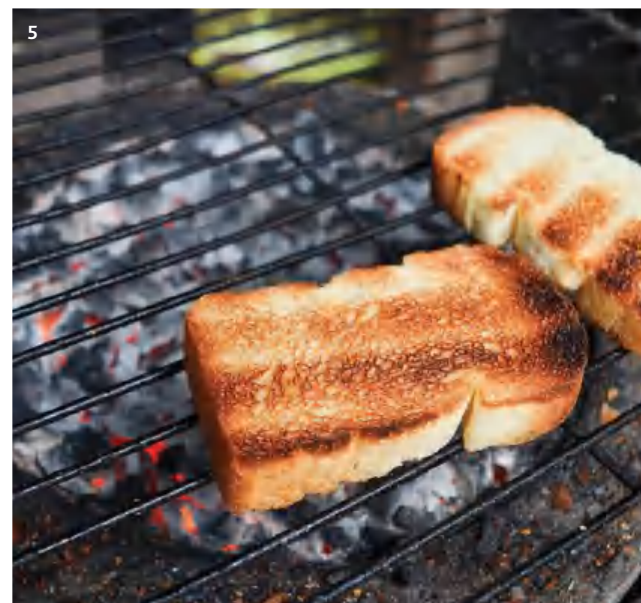
Below: [Nobody does ilish maachh bhaja](#) (fried *hilsa*) quite like [Tero Parbon](#)

your mouth, smack your lips and earn a beaming smile from the portly cashier seated behind the counter.

There's no room for fussing with knives and forks when you are standing on the pavement outside [Apanjan](#) restaurant either, and munching on fish *kabiraji* (₹ 90) and mustard sauce. This hole-in-the-wall does a brisk trade every evening and the divine 'Real Calcutta' fish fillet is the first to fly off its shelves (from ₹ 90, prices vary for different varieties and are subject to seasonal changes).

At [Suruchi](#), sari-clad, kindly women run the show. Sit down for a wholesome veg *thali* (₹ 160) suffused with the goodness of homely flavours and allow mother





GREAT FROM

New Delhi, Guwahati

GREAT FOR

Comfort food in the monsoon

GO NOW

As the rains bring plenty of *hilsa*.

figures to fuss over you and cajole you to eat more. Non-vegetarian dishes are available à la carte – the melt-in-the-mouth *ilish bhapa*, or steamed *hilsa* (₹ 300), is a must-have.

Another wildly popular restaurant is the perennially-crowded [Kasturi](#).

Families sit at formica-topped tables, coated with a thin layer of grease, amid general chaos, but its signature dish, *kochu bhapa chingri*, or steamed prawn, with taro root (₹ 90), makes it worth the while.

Across the town, at the Shyambazaar crossing, is the iconic, but comparatively low-key [New Punjab Hotel](#). The *kosha mangsho*, or spicy mutton (₹ 170/ four pieces), comes floating in *masala*-laden oil, garnished with fresh onions and a tangy tamarind chutney. Munch slowly on your *parantha* (₹ 90) as this dish is guaranteed to make your eyes water. If you're left smoking at the ears, cool off with *mishti doi* (₹ 285) and *aam pora shorbot* – a tangy

1. The restaurant at [Corner Courtyard](#) is crammed with colonial curiosities

2. [Adarsha Hindu Hotel](#) serves traditional fish and rice on banana leaves

3. Kolkata's street food is the stuff of legend

4. *Mishti doi* nicely rounds off a meal at [Suruchi](#)

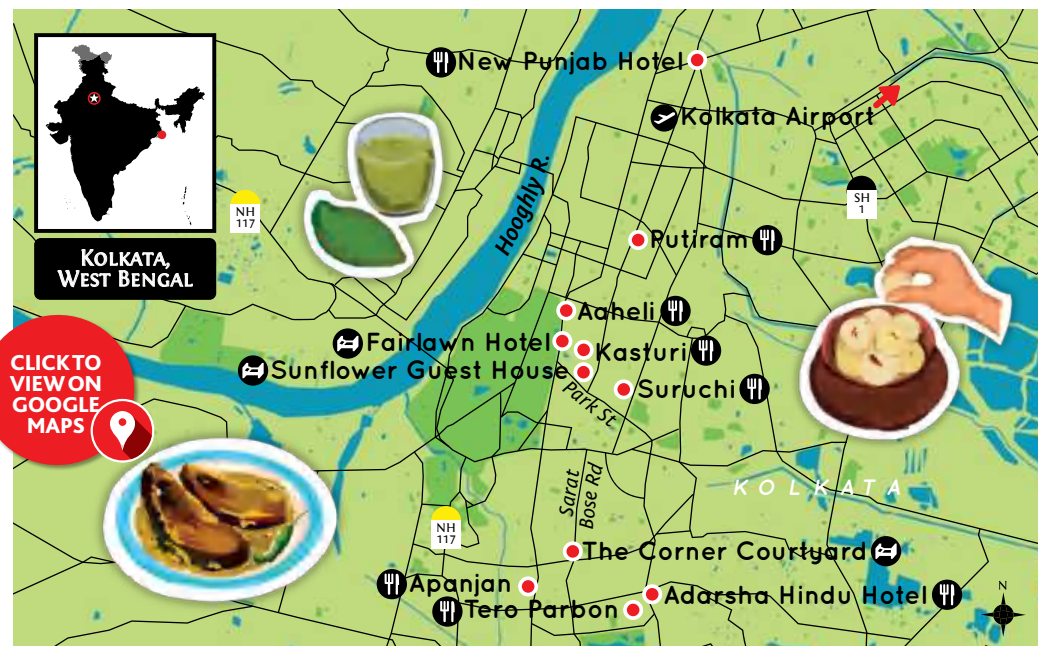
5. In the *khaul gully* at Dalhousie Street, the iconic toast is made on charcoal grills

raw mango drink (₹ 275) at [Aaheli](#) restaurant. This traditional joint has live music and invites you to linger over its scrumptious Aahelihar *bhuribhoj*, an elaborate non-vegetarian Bengali *thali* that will take some time and considerable intervals of rest to plow through (₹ 1,555).

In the course of your meal, you'll also learn that there's simply no skipping dessert. And so you end your Bengali sojourn on a hot and sweet note with a freshly-made *rosogolla* (₹ 5/ small piece) at [Putiram](#)'s sweet shop. Gluttony never felt this good.

WORDS AMBIKA GUPTA

PHOTOGRAPHS KRISHNA ANGIRA

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Kolkata

Closest airport: Kolkata's **Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport** (18km from Kolkata's centre [Park Street]) is well connected by daily flights to other metros (return fares from ₹ 8,852).

GETTING AROUND

Though Kolkata has an extensive and convenient

public transport network with a variety of options. During the monsoon, the easiest way to move around town is by the ubiquitous yellow Ambassador taxis (minimum fare: ₹ 30). Another convenient option is to hire a car with driver. We used **Help Tourism** (00-91-33-24550917; www.helptourism.com, kolkata@helptourism.com; AC small car from ₹ 1,500/ eight hours). You can also hire a private cab, as Meru cabs, Mega cabs and Ola cabs all operate in Kolkata.

**WHERE TO STAY****Sunflower Guest House:**

This basic, no-frills establishment has spacious rooms but no restaurant. It's housed in an old building complete with a sweeping, open-plan stairwell and a clanking metal-grilled elevator (00-91-33-22299401/ 8388; www.sunflowerguesthouse.com, sunflowerguesthouse@gmail.com; 7, Royd St, near Crossing of Park St and Free School St, Chowringhee; from ₹ 1,400).

Fairlawn Hotel: This hotel has a stellar location right next to the Indian Museum. Its leafy garden restaurant, comfortable furniture and friendly staff give it a relaxed, laid-back vibe (00-91-33-22521510/ 8766; www.fairlawnhotel.com, fairlawnhotel@gmail.com; 13A, Sudder St; from ₹ 3,200 with breakfast and afternoon tea).

The Corner Courtyard: This century-old heritage property has been delightfully restored and boasts of a fine restaurant.

The vintage rooms are atmospheric and cosy (00-91-9903999567, 00-91-33-40610145; www.thecornercourtyard.com, thecornercourtyard@gmail.com; 92B, Sarat Bose Rd; from ₹ 5,500 with breakfast and wi-fi).

**WHERE TO EAT**

Tero Parbon ①: 00-91-33-24640199; 49/ C, Purna Das Rd; 12pm – 10.30pm
Adarsha Hindu Hotel ②: 00-91-33-24602147; Stall no G-95, 212, Rash Behari Ave, Gariahat Market; 9am – 4pm, 7pm – 10pm
Apanjan ③: 00-91-9647813056; 50B, Sadananda Rd; 2pm – 9pm
Suruchi ④: 00-91-33-22293292; 89, Elliot Rd; 10am – 5.45pm Mon – Fri, till 4.45pm Sat, till 2.45pm Sun
Kasturi ⑤: 7A, Mushtaque Ahmed St
New Punjab Hotel ⑥: 00-91-33-25546096; 211, APC Rd, Shyambazar; 12.30pm – 11.30pm
Aaheli ⑦: 00-91-33-44003900, 00-91-9831780403; www.sarovarhotels.com.

[com](http://www.com); The Peerless Inn, 12, JL Nehru Rd; 12.30pm – 3pm, 7.30pm – 11pm

Putiram ⑧: 00-91-33-22417567; 12/B, Surya Sen St; 6am – 9pm, hot *rosogolla* available from 8.30pm to 9pm

**SHOPPING**

Suruchi, a self-help group, provides shelter, rehabilitation and employment to destitute women. Behind the eatery, you'll find lovely hand-woven bedsheets and bed covers as well as block-printed dining sets and table linen on display. Block-printed cotton saris are also available on order (see *Where to Eat*; bed covers from ₹ 650). Take home the delicious, mildly-sweet *sandesh* from **Putiram** (see *Where to Eat*; from ₹ 10/ piece).

**WHAT TO PACK**

Rain shoes to help you wade through rain water, rain gear, antacids

**CLEAN LOO GUIDE**

Most of the eateries mentioned in the story are cubbyholes that don't have loos and the ones available aren't very clean. It's a good idea to carry hand sanitiser and schedule your loo breaks for the proper, sit-down restaurants like Tero Parbon and Aaheli.

SAFETY

Kolkata is quite safe, but take precautions against any rain-related damage and carry a flashlight if you'll be out late.

**MEDICAL AID**

Kolkata has plenty of well-reputed hospitals like **Fortis Hospital** (00-91-33-66284444; www.fortishealthcare.com/india; 730, Anandapur, EM Bypass Rd; check website for other locations).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

It might be a chore dragging the little ones through the rain from one eatery to another, so it's best to leave them at home. If you do bring them along, they'll love the sweet shops where *sandesh* comes in shapes like toy-sized elephants to colourful swans and in mouth-watering flavours like strawberry, mango, tutti-frutti and more.

GOOD TO KNOW

* Most restaurants don't open before 11.30am, so use that time to do a spot of sightseeing.

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Rainy-day stays in Udaipur, Rajasthan

FIT FOR A KING

There's a constant racket at [Shikarbadi](#). The high-pitched calls of the peacocks that roam the grounds, punctuated by the comical honking of the ducks in the lake and the deep neigh of the horses from the stud farm fill the air here. But despite this, and perhaps *because* of it, you'll love this hotel (see *Where to Stay* for all details). Set at the edge of a forest with the Aravalli Hills in the distance, this 250-acre property is one of the many cool stay options in Udaipur offering great discounts this time of year.

What was once the preserve of the royal family of Mewar is today an elegant hotel with hunting lodge-style rooms.

On the hotel grounds, you'll find a pool, a restaurant and a pretty lake, as well as birds and animals. You'll meet the other guests just before tea-time. At about 4pm, the resident spotted deer trot up to the huge trough in the Deer Park within the property, which is filled with bagsful of corn kernels. What's great is that the animals aren't held in enclosures; due to the property's proximity to the forest, the deer simply come in around feeding time and wander off once they've had their fill. Not only can you gawk at them from your balcony, you can also hop on down and hold out a handful of kernels, so that they can shove their velvety noses into your hand

*Madri Haveli's suites come with a large **baithak** in the living room that's great for afternoon naps as well as **chai-time** lounging*

and munch noisily on the treats (*free*). You can then saunter down to the garden dining area to gorge on some treats of your own. And if it isn't raining, dine right here at tables overlooking the lake as the cicadas and crickets compete with each other while the mosquitoes feast on you. But the views are so pretty, you won't mind it at all.

Another lakeside property at which to put your feet up is [Silence Lakend Club & Resort](#). Spend your days lounging on the wooden deck of your huge room looking out over the lake with endless cups of *chai* and catch up on sleep, because, late at night, you'll go say hello to the neighbours. The forests



GREAT FROM

New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai

GREAT FOR

Grabbing monsoon discounts

GO NOW

For a cool and breezy Rajasthan.

in these parts are home to leopards who roam freely in them. You hop into an open pick-up truck with mattresses laid out by the staff, who accompany you with flashlights, and drive off into the cool night (₹ 1,000/ person, depending on the weather). You might spot one

stalking on a water pipe right by the road, or if you look up, you might just lock eyes with one sitting in the bushes. Return to your room for views of a moonlit lake before drifting off to sleep. Be warned, though, that the lake is fed by rain water, so, if there's been no rain, the only views you'll have are of a giant, empty lake-bed.

Still, if you're here to explore the maze of tiny lanes that Udaipur is known for, make your way to [Madri Haveli](#). From the outside, it looks like any other building in the Chandpole area. Step into your room and it's like you've stumbled onto a Bollywood film set. The floors and walls are made of black stone while bright pillows add colour to the otherwise

1. Udaipur's tiny lanes are confusing but fun to wander about

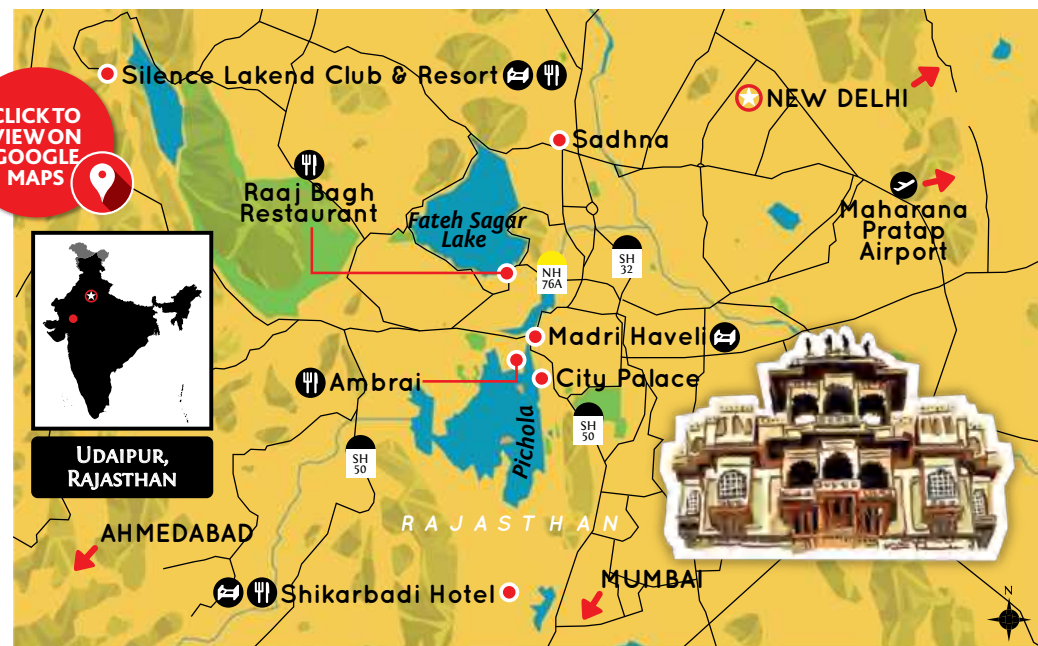
2 & 5. This little canopy leads out to the pool at Silence Lakend Club & Resort, whose rooms are perfect forolling about in

3. Hold out some corn kernels and these fuzzy-nosed things will eat 'em right out of your palm at Shikarbadi

4. The locals are a friendly lot – yes, even this grumpy-looking chap

monochromatic room. The bathroom features brass furnishings and enormous brass pots placed tastefully in the corners. To make the most of the monsoon, troop upstairs to the terrace restaurant and watch the clouds come in, or, if you don't feel like getting out of your jammies, stay indoors and watch the coloured glass windows making patterns on the crisp white sheets of the *baithak* while the rain beats a steady rhythm on the tin roofs outside, as you take in the labyrinth of lanes that is Chandpole from your tiny *jharoka*, with a hot cuppa in hand.

WORDS HARDIKA PANCHAL
PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA

**FACT SHEET****GETTING THERE**

Closest metro: Ahmedabad (approximately 255km) and New Delhi (680km). If you're travelling from Ahmedabad, it's best to drive down (4.5 hours).

Closest airport: Udaipur's Maharana Pratap Airport (25km). Most major metros are well-connected to Udaipur (return flights from New Delhi from ₹ 4,700).

Closest railhead: Udaipur City (UDZ; 5km). Take the 12963 Mewar Express (leaves Hazrat

Nizamuddin [NZM] 7pm, arrives UDZ 7.20am; ₹ 1,090 Third AC) and return by the 12964 Mewar Express (leaves UDZ 6.15pm, arrives NZM 6.35am; ₹ 1,090 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

Distances are short and rickshaws are easily available, but fix a price before getting in.

We used and liked the services of Kaustubh Holidays Tours & Travels Pvt Ltd (00-91-9829016388; kaustubh.holidays@gmail.com; from ₹ 2,600/ day for an AC Etios).

Mughlai, Chinese, Thai and continental. The meals at **Silence Lakend Club & Resort** are of the homely, Rajasthani variety, which aren't elaborate but tasty nonetheless. **Madri Haveli** serves all meals on the terrace, which is covered when it rains, and offers views of the Aravallis in the distance. The cuisine is largely Mughlai and Rajasthani (lunch: ₹ 525, dinner: ₹ 650). If you feel like stepping out to eat, try **Raaj Bagh** in the city for a lovely Mughlai meal overlooking Fateh Sagar Lake – don't miss the hot gulab jamuns (00-91-294-2431701; www.raajbagh.in; Fateh Sagar Lake; 7.30am – 11pm, 12pm – 4pm, 6.30pm – 10.30pm; mains from ₹ 210, gulab jamuns: ₹ 100). Head to **Ambrai Restaurant**, which is set so close to Lake Pichola it feels like you're floating on it. It's a great place for a sundowner (00-91-294-2434009; www.amethaveliudaipur.com; outside Chandpole; 12.30pm – 3.30pm, 6.30pm – 10.30pm; beer: ₹ 275/ 650ml, vodka: ₹ 170/ 30ml; mains from ₹ 350).

**SHOPPING**

Walk down the streets of Udaipur and you'll find all the usual trinkets and *dupattas* that you see in any Rajasthani city. If you're keen on picking up some, do so at **Sadhna**, which helps women from the rural, tribal and slum belts in Udaipur by teaching them skills like patchwork and embroidery (00-91-294-2454655; www.sadhna.org; Old Fatehpura; 10am – 6.30pm Mon – Sat; small notebook: ₹ 200, cushion cover: ₹ 325).

SAFETY

Udaipur is largely a safe city but some areas and lanes get deserted after sunset.

**MEDICAL AID**

GBH American Hospital

is one of the many options in the city (00-91-294-2426000; www.gbhamericanhospital.com; 101, Kothi Bagh, Bhatt Ji Ki Bari, Meera Girls College Rd).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Shikarbadi is the only property that is well-suited to children; the other two hotels don't have anything to keep the kids entertained.

GOOD TO KNOW

* The night leopard safari at **Silence Lakend Club & Resort** isn't conducted by a naturalist, but by the local staff who are familiar with the area.

**WHERE TO STAY**

Shikarbadi: The 21 rooms and four suites are very comfy, but pick the Deluxe Rooms at the back if you want a view of the Deer Park. This is a good pick for families, as there are lots of animals here to thrill the young ones. There's also an in-house ayurvedic spa (00-91-294-2583201; www.hrhhotels.com; Goverdhan Villas; from ₹ 4,000, two-night, three-day package: ₹ 11,999 with stay in a Deluxe Room for two, breakfast, lunch or dinner and free wi-fi, full-body massage: ₹ 1,000/ person/ one hour).

Silence Lakend Club & Resort:

All rooms come with huge four-poster beds and wooden decks – perfect for sundowners or stargazing. There is also a little garden, pool and an in-house restaurant (00-91-9001097380, 00-91-294-2432344; www.silencelakend.com; Nathawato ka Guda, Lake Badi; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast and dinner).

Madri Haveli: With 14 rooms set around an open courtyard, this tiny hotel packs quite a punch. The staff is very helpful and offers you a map of the very confusing area, which you should hold onto, as it's easy to get lost in the lanes after dark. Pick from the Standard (₹ 2,000), Standard Plus (₹ 2,500) and Deluxe Rooms (₹ 3,500) or spring for the small suite (₹ 7,800) or the big suite (₹ 8,500), which are undoubtedly the best (00-91-294-6621106, 00-91-9829116621; www.madrihaveli.com; info@madrihaveli.com; 70, Ganesh Gati, inside Chandpole, near Gadiya Devra; rates include breakfast, a 30 per cent monsoon discount is available on all rooms until September 30, 2015).

**WHERE TO EAT & DRINK**

Shikarbadi serves a meal fit for a king with starters, *subzis* (including a non-veg dish), *rotis* and dessert (lunch & dinner: ₹ 1,000 each). There's also the option of à la carte, which features

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Gandikota, Andhra Pradesh

CHRONICLES IN STONE

A winding road inclines upwards amid sparse brushland and wind turbines, past Jammalamadugu in the Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh. The road levels and narrows, turns a corner and suddenly Gandikota, literally meaning stone gorge fort in Telugu, comes into view.

The fort is believed to have been built in the latter half of the 13th century by the Kakatiya kings, then passed on to the Vijayanagar rulers and later to Qutub Shahi kings. But it's believed that the Pemmasani Nayaks, a local martial clan, had the longest hold, ruling the area for nearly 300 years. Today it stands in splendid isolation, much of it in ruins,

merely hinting at the surfeit of stories that it hides within its walls.

The fort wall is imposing, stretching a few hundred feet, broken by bastions. A set of towering parallel walls, designed to look like a sleeping 'S', form the entrance. Walk around and you'll notice that each of the empires has left its mark. The fort walls are estimated to run for about five to six kilometres, varying in height from 10m to 13m and more than a metre thick at the base, with 101 bastions that are almost 40ft high.

Stroll along the path leading out from the entrance and you'll find yourself in a little village. Ramshackle houses flank the path while villagers and cattle mill

Above: It's hard to believe that the dramatic Gandikota is in India

Below: One of the carved stones at the Dam Site Museum (see *Good to Know*)

about, casting curious glances. Amid the houses stands the square, squat structure of the jail, which is a sort of cultural hub, located as it is near ancient temples and a mosque. The jail itself is forbidding, with a handful of doorways and no windows. A low entrance leads to a cavernous hallway with many cells, lending an eerie vibe to the whole place.

In stark contrast to the jail's austere facade is the **Madhvaraya Swamy Temple** nearby. The towering *gopuram* with its exquisite carvings sets the tone. Inside the temple, you can see scenes from the *Ramayana*, depictions of Vishnu, stories from Krishna's life, and more. As there's no deity, the innermost part





GREAT FROM

Bangalore, Hyderabad

GREAT FOR

History buffs and fantastic scenery

GO NOW

While it's pleasant enough to walk around.

has been taken over by cows, so watch out for pats of cow dung, though the architecture more than makes up for the potential discomfort.

At the other end of the fort lie the ruins of [Ranganathaswamy Temple](#). Most of the pillars are bare, giving

the temple an air of bleakness. But there are still some carvings of decorated elephants, celestial guards and stories from legends.

As if providing a counterpoint to the temple, the [Jama Masjid](#) next door is all Islamic architecture with arched doorways, tiny minarets and windows with *jaali* work. Inside, standing on a raised platform is a Charminar-like structure with twin minarets and arched doorways with motifs. There's not a soul in sight and the silence is broken only by bursts of screeching from a flock of parakeets.

Turn away from this haunting scene and head past the temple to a stretch of bouldered, desolate landscape.

1 & 4. The architecture of Madhvaraya Swamy Temple resembles the Vijayanagar style

2. A garden lizard wanders among the boulders above the gorge

3. No, this isn't the Charminar – Jama Masjid houses this structure in a tiny village in Kadapa District

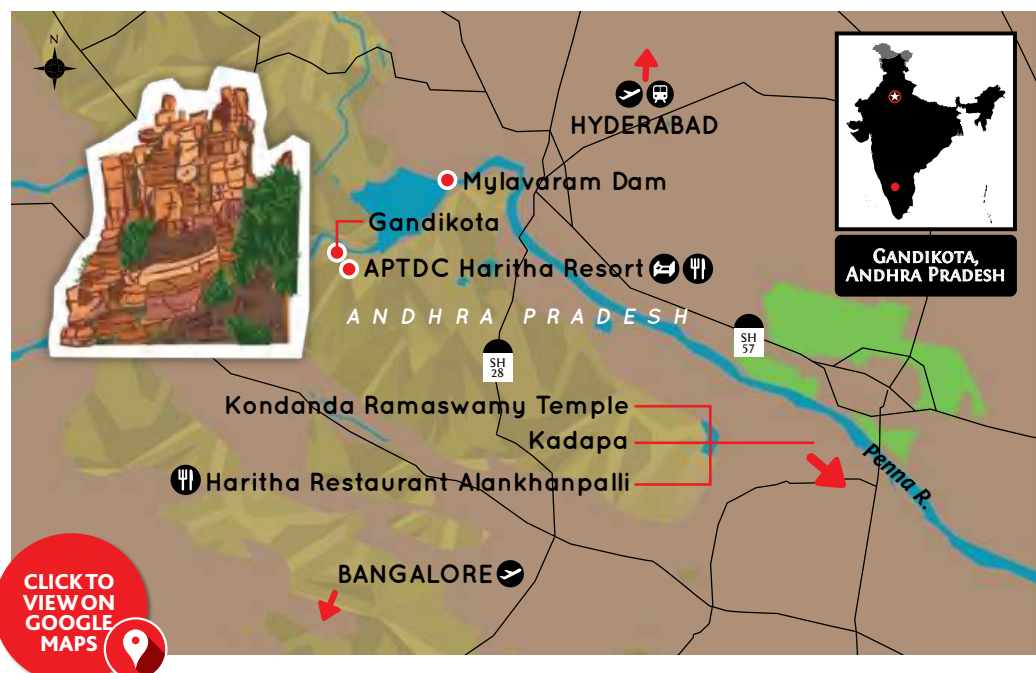
5. The carved pillars inside Kondanda Ramaswamy Temple in Vontimitta (see *Good to Know*)

At the far end, the land just seems to fall away. There's no path, but if you scramble down the rocks, you reach the precarious edge of a dramatic gorge with rocky promontories, much like the Grand Canyon. A few hundred feet below, the Pennar River flows lazily as a few boats and coracles twirl and bob on it.

It's only here, when you perch on a boulder and look down at the gorge, with bastions encompassing temples, mosque and other ruins, that you get a true perspective of Gandikota – a kind of framed big picture, if you will.

WORDS ANITA RAO-KASHI

PHOTOGRAPHS VINOBHA NATHAN



FACT SHEET

GETTING THERE

Closest metro: Bangalore (281km). The route via Kadiri might be the shortest but opt to travel via Kadapa (335km), which takes six hours and 45 minutes as the roads are good and there are stops for meals and loo breaks.

Closest airport: Bangalore's Kempegowda International Airport (345km) is well connected to Indian metros (return fares from ₹ 2,500).

Hyderabad International Airport (350km) is an option too (return fares from ₹ 4,400).

Closest railhead: Muddanuru (MOO; 29km).

There are no trains from Bangalore, but Hyderabad's Kacheguda Railway Station (KCG) has options. Take the 12797 Venkatadri Express (leaves KCG 8.05pm, arrives MOO 3.38am; ₹ 750 Third AC) and return by the 12798 Venkatadri Express (leaves MOO 10.10pm, arrives KCG 6.20am; ₹ 750 Third AC).

GETTING AROUND

It's advisable to have a private vehicle to get to Gandikota as public transport is unpredictable. Hire a car from Hyderabad, or drive down yourself, as it's pretty expensive to hire one from Bangalore.

WHERE TO STAY

APTDC Haritha Resort:

This is the only available accommodation in Gandikota. The resort, a five-minute walk from the fort, has sprawling premises with stone cottages. However, they're basic and not very hygienic (00-91-7382237380; www.aptdc.gov.in, helpdesk@aptdc.in; near the fort; from ₹ 2,200).

Haritha Hotel: A better option is this hotel with the same name, also run by APTDC but in a different location in Kadapa (85km), but with decent rooms (00-91-8562-240533/ 91-9705173800; www.aptdc.gov.in, helpdesk@aptdc.in; Nagarajupeta, Kadapa; from ₹ 2,400).

Manasa Inn: This is another option in Kadapa with basic rooms, internet access and an in-house restaurant (00-91-8562-258666; www.manasainnkadapa.com, info@manasainnkadapa.com;

123/ 1C1, RS Rd, Beside SBI, Yerramukkapalli, Kadapa; from ₹ 1,700).

WHERE TO EAT

Haritha Resort

is the only food option in Gandikota. It serves vegetarian and non-vegetarian food (see *Where to Stay*; 7am–10pm; snacks from ₹ 45, mains from ₹ 60). En route, stop either at **Haritha Restaurant Alankhanpalli** for a buffet meal (00-91-9848185774; outside Kadapa; ₹ 100) or at the **Haritha Hotel** in Kadapa town, which has limited lunch options (see *Where to Stay*; veg thali: ₹ 96, chicken biryani: ₹ 190).

WHAT TO PACK

Light cottons and comfy shoes or floaters with good grip are recommended for walking around the fort

CLEAN LOO GUIDE

There aren't too many clean options

en route. **Haritha Hotel** in Kadapa (see *Where to Stay*) or the **Haritha Restaurant** in Alankhanpalli outside Kadapa (see *Where to Eat*) are the most hygienic options.

SAFETY

It's safe to wander around the fort during the day, but avoid venturing out after sunset since it is rocky and wild. The path towards the river involves jumping over stones and boulders, so watch your step.

MEDICAL AID

There is hardly any medical assistance in and around Gandikota. The nearest medical facility, the **Himalaya Multi-specialty Hospital**, is in Kadapa (00-91-85622-56100; RS Rd, Yerramukkapalli, Kadapa).

CHILD-FRIENDLINESS

Young children might find some of the paths a bit difficult to handle and the walk could be a little tiring for them too.

GOOD TO KNOW

- * There are no gates, timings or entry fees for the fort.
- * The landscape is rocky, and gets very hot by noon, so time your visit for early morning or late afternoon.
- * August and September are peak months and it can get crowded during the weekends so try to visit during the week for a better experience.
- * If you have a few extra hours, head to **Mylavaram Dam** (outside Jammalamadugu; 18km/ 45 mins), across the Pennar River. The reservoir is a pleasant sight and a walk on the dam is refreshing when it's not hot. Look out for the **Dam Site Museum** near the entrance (00-91-9885551210; 10.30am–5pm, closed Fri and second Sat; free). Set up in an abandoned watch tower, it houses a collection of stone carvings, idols, weapons and coins collected from the villages, which were submerged in the dam waters.
- * If you're up for more temple-hopping, take a detour after Kadapa, an hour away, to visit the **Kondanda Ramaswamy Temple** in Vontimitta (Rajampet, Kadapa district; 5.30am–12pm, 2pm–8pm). Dedicated to Lord Rama, it bears the distinct stamp of the Vijayanagar style of architecture. After the bifurcation of the state, this is where the AP government holds the official Ramanavami celebrations.

Tiffin breaks

In Tamil Nadu, 'tiffin' is something to be excited about. While many other parts of the country relegate the term to being a modest lunch carrier, in Chennai, tiffin is the all-important snacks served between meals and the city even dedicates eating houses to the cause. Be prepared to skip dinner.

MURUGAN IDLI SHOP

Its namesake *idlis* are fluffy and the *meduvadai* achieves the perfect balance of crisp and pillow soft, but reserve some room on the banana leaf and in your belly for the sinful ghee *podu dosai* – it's crackling, laced with spice and served with a medley of chutneys. With outlets all over the city, it's no wonder Chennai has zero trouble waking up (00-91-44-42084842; www.muruganidlishop.com; 46/ 13, North Usman Rd, T Nagar; 7am – 11.30pm; idli: ₹ 15, meduvadai: ₹ 24, ghee podu dosai: ₹ 85).

MYLAI KARPAGAMBAL MESS

Adorned with images of deities and fresh flowers, this atmospheric and typically Tam-Brahm 'mess' is just the place to taste traditional Iyer foods. The *pongal* here is popular but don't

miss the glistening cashew-studded wheat *halva*, the famous *badam halva* or the hot, ghee-laden carrot *halva*. Buy packets of *podu* to take home, they claim to sell up to 15 varieties of the much-loved condiment (00-91-44-42112377; 20, East Mada St, Mylapore; 7am – 10pm; badam halva: ₹ 80, podu: ₹ 60).

RAYARS MESS

To call Rayars Mess unassuming would be an exaggeration. With a menu limited to just a handful of items, this tiny eatery operates in just one small green-lacquered room, marked by a lone handpainted sign, down a narrow bylane. But it's a Mylapore institution and any local will help you locate it. Slide onto a bench, demolish the *adai*, a dense, spicy *dosa* made from mixed lentils and rice, and wash it down with the piping-hot filter coffee, or *kaapi*. The heady, caramel-toned brew is easily one of the best in the city (00-91-9940425551; 31, Arundel St, Mylapore; 7am – 10.30am, 3pm – 6.30pm; closed Sun evenings; adai: ₹ 25, kaapi: ₹ 20).

MAMI TIFFIN STALL

Even with standing room only, it doesn't take long after the doors open at 4pm



Masal vadai, bonda and other teatime treats at Mami Tiffin Stall

Above: Don't miss the frothy filter kaapi at Rayars Mess

for Mami Tiffin Stall to fill up with locals salivating over the excellent fried snacks on offer. Order at the cash counter, collect your receipt and make haste for the crunchy, savoury *masal vadai* and the *bonda* – plain or stuffed with potato. Get a parcel of *kozhukattai*, round rice flour dumplings with a coconut and jaggery filling, to go (00-91-9840272288; Pitchu Pillai St, off East Mada St; 7am – 11am, 11.30am – 3pm, 4pm – 10.30pm, Sun closed; masal vadai: ₹ 15, bonda: ₹ 25).

MARINA BEACH

Though you'll find everything from *kela bajji*, or plantain fritters, and masala *kara pori* (puffed rice) on busy Marina Beach at sundown, Chennai's age-old beach and temple festival favourite is *thenga manga pattani sundal* (a kind of *bhel*), sold by young boys carrying covered steel vessels and wandering about. Make it your mission to track one down and be rewarded with a paper cone filled with coconut-flecked, boiled white peas topped with shavings of tart green mango (around sunset; ₹ 10 – ₹ 20).

WORDS SHEENA DABHOLKAR

PHOTOGRAPHS JEREMIAH CHRISTANAND RAO



SOMETIMES, A CAMERA ONLY COMES IN THE WAY.



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- PG 76** With killer museums, rough-and-tumble games and a whole lot of *craic*, we dare you to not fall in love with the young-at-heart **Dublin**
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Dublin has plenty
for the young
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MAIDEN

There's a certain quirkiness about Taiwan that makes it terribly endearing. Maybe it's the family-friendly nightclubs or the spread of seafood that will make you drool guiltily the next time you watch *Finding Nemo*. If this is your maiden voyage to this lush island of smiling people (never mind that their ancestors were headhunters), be prepared to have some pleasant surprises thrown your way

WORDS SHARMEEN HUSSAIN | PHOTOGRAPHS HIMANSHU PANDYA

62 **lonely planet** September 2015



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TAIWAN





1



2



3



4

1 & 8. Taiwan's night markets have so much going on, you're torn between eating a snack and having a caricature made

2. Pop art finds its place on the street beneath Taipei 101

3. These whales outside the National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium look so lifelike, it's hard not to run away screaming

4. The Pier 2 Art Centre is full of eclectic and contemporary art work that doesn't conform to any categories

5. The jadeite cabbage at the National Palace Museum even has two bugs carved into it, and is one of the biggest draws at the museum

6. Squeeze through a cave in the Kenting Forest Recreation Area that only allows a sliver of the sky to show as you pass through

7. What did one mushroom in the Kenting Forest Recreation Area say to the other? I'm a fungi

Previous pages: It's a riot of colours, sounds and aromas at Raohe Street Night Market



5



6



7



8



Puffer fish or *hetun* is a delicacy that is widely enjoyed in Taiwan. Even the skin, or *yupi*, is savoured, and only chefs with a licence are allowed to prepare this poisonous fish

TAIPEI PERSONALITY

I take a bite of the puffer fish and quietly await my imminent death. I chew slowly, trying to enjoy myself even though it feels like I'm eating cartilage. We're sitting in a restaurant in Taipei, Taiwan's very modern capital city, and the room's beginning to swim. Just when I think I can see my life flashing before my eyes, I hear a round of nervous laughter from around the table. Peter, our guide, has just informed us that the chef has 'the licence' to prepare the deadly puffer fish for consumption by unwitting visitors like myself. And so, after about five minutes, when I'm quite convinced the poison hasn't seeped into my bloodstream, I begin to relax. It's not very tasty, but I'm pretty stoked to still be alive, so I really enjoy the rest of the meal. But don't get me wrong, the rest of the food *is* delicious: swordfish sashimi served on a bed of thinly-sliced onion, curly baby octopus with *bokchoy* and basil, grilled cuttlefish with red chillies and more *bokchoy*. Fresh (and unusual) seafood is something Taiwan specialises in, and, whether you're looking for sea urchin, upside-down jellyfish or fish innards, you're more than likely to find it here, and find it tasty.

An island nation, Taiwan has long relied on the sea for its food. From the aborigines – Austronesian people who were once the sole inhabitants of the land but now make up only two per cent of the population – to the present-day population, which is a mixture of aborigines, Japanese and even Han Chinese, they all love their fish. But more on that later. First, let us give the grave matter of this country's history its due importance.

For a while now, Taiwan has been regarded by some as an orphan state. Abandoned by its fathers time and again – first by Portuguese and Dutch settlers, and then the Japanese, who left

unceremoniously after WWII – it finally managed to gain success after detaching itself from its biological father (China) and step-dads. After the Chinese Civil War, China's government was split into the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC), run by the Kuomintang party leader, Chiang Kai-shek. The ROC relocated to Taiwan, and, in 1950, the ROC's power was restricted to Taiwan. An armistice was never signed, and so, to this day, the war technically isn't even over.

The question of whether Taiwan is still a part of mainland China is a sticky one. It doesn't help that China has 1,500 missiles pointed toward the island waiting to fire if the ROC ever declares its independence. Suffice it to say that the country is in a bit of a soup regarding its polity and governance. But that doesn't make it any less cool.

Taipei seems to have shrugged its shoulders at this political indecision and got on with life. The modern city has all the trappings of an urban heaven and you wouldn't for a moment believe this was once a land of headhunting aboriginal savages. Globalisation has hit. *Hard*. Foreign cars whiz down the immaculate city streets, pedestrians dress in vogue-esque outfits, malls are stuffed with designer brands and life, as it is, goes on.

Inside the very large and very confusing **Guang Hua Digital Plaza**, a gadget mall, there is proof everywhere of Taiwan's technological advancements. Following the economic boom in the late 20th century (famously known as the Taiwan Miracle), many local brands began supplying to worldwide firms and even set up branches in Silicon Valley, USA. I realise now why all my stationery when I was in 6th grade and any cool gadgets that made their way to my house were suddenly all Made in Taiwan. →



1. The Memorial Hall Square of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall also houses the National Concert Hall complex (pictured) and the National Theatre

2. This young man in Ximending was trying hard to win my favour so I would allow him to take a photo of me... and pay him for it, of course

‘A country that endorses midnight snacks? Taiwan just became my new best friend’

As the sun sets, youngsters with green and pink hair emerge onto the streets, ready for the night. We decide to experience a slice of their evening for ourselves, but not before viewing the sunset from the top of **Elephant Mountain**. A hike up the slippery trail brings us to a viewing point that offers us unmatched panoramas of the twinkling city skyline. Soon after, we make our way to **Ximending**, a popular local hangout, where the neon lights, kerbside stalls and their owners with their fluffy pet dogs jostle for our attention. Artists paint on the pavement and play musical instruments amplified by cheap speakers while food carts sell all manner of *xiaochi* – ‘small eats’, or snacks. These substantial snacks are widely accepted as the fourth meal of the day. A country that endorses midnight snacks? Taiwan just became my new best friend. I’m considering trying some oyster omelettes and sewage-smelling stinky tofu (even the locals say it smells like sewage, I swear!) but decide against it because, well, it’s pretty stinky (see *Make it Happen* for all details). So naturally, I direct my attention to other things. Like shopping. Cheap retail seems to be the buzzword here, and I’m amazed at what my money can buy – knock-off designer garments, shoes, miniature figurines of myself crafted on the spot, accessories, back warmers, incense bottles... At **Raohe Street Night Market**, another one of many night markets in Taipei, you can even get your eyebrows threaded on the road, in plain view of everyone. It’s all very exciting and all very surreal. I curb my enthusiasm with a jacket potato doused in melted cheese from a stall nearby (what five-course meal?).

We make our way back to our hotel with the help of some very eager and helpful locals. As a side note, you’ve got to hand it to the people here for their warmth and generosity. Even with the language barrier, since not too many Taiwanese speak English, they’ll do whatever they can to help you out, and do it with a smile and a *xie xie*. Why they are thanking me when they’re the ones helping is beyond me, but that’s just how they are. *Xie xie ni*, Taipei. Thank you very much.

The next morning, we find ourselves atop the bamboo-shaped **Taipei 101**, once the world’s tallest building. Love-struck couples and giggling tourists take cringe-worthy photographs of themselves with selfie sticks. I see the mountains that create the Taipei basin, and the glimmering Tanshui River that divides the city into the modern east side and the more traditional west. On the streets below, practitioners of Falun Gong are staging a protest. This school of belief was banned in China in 1999 after the Communist Party of China deemed it a threat to its sovereignty. Thousands of practitioners of the faith were put in prison where they were supposedly subjected to physical torture, coercive methods of thought reform and organ harvesting (no, really). In Taiwan, where hundreds still practise the faith, members are often found staging protests against their ill-treatment near tourist attractions frequented by Chinese visitors.

There are other relics from Taiwan’s mainland connection at the sprawling **National Palace Museum**. When the Civil War began to heat up in 1948, some 60,000 treasures from the original Palace Museum in Beijing’s Forbidden City were transferred to Taiwan. This shrewd move was →



Taipei 101 stands tall against Taipei's skyline, and locals use the colours on the building, which change every day, to remind them which day of the week it is





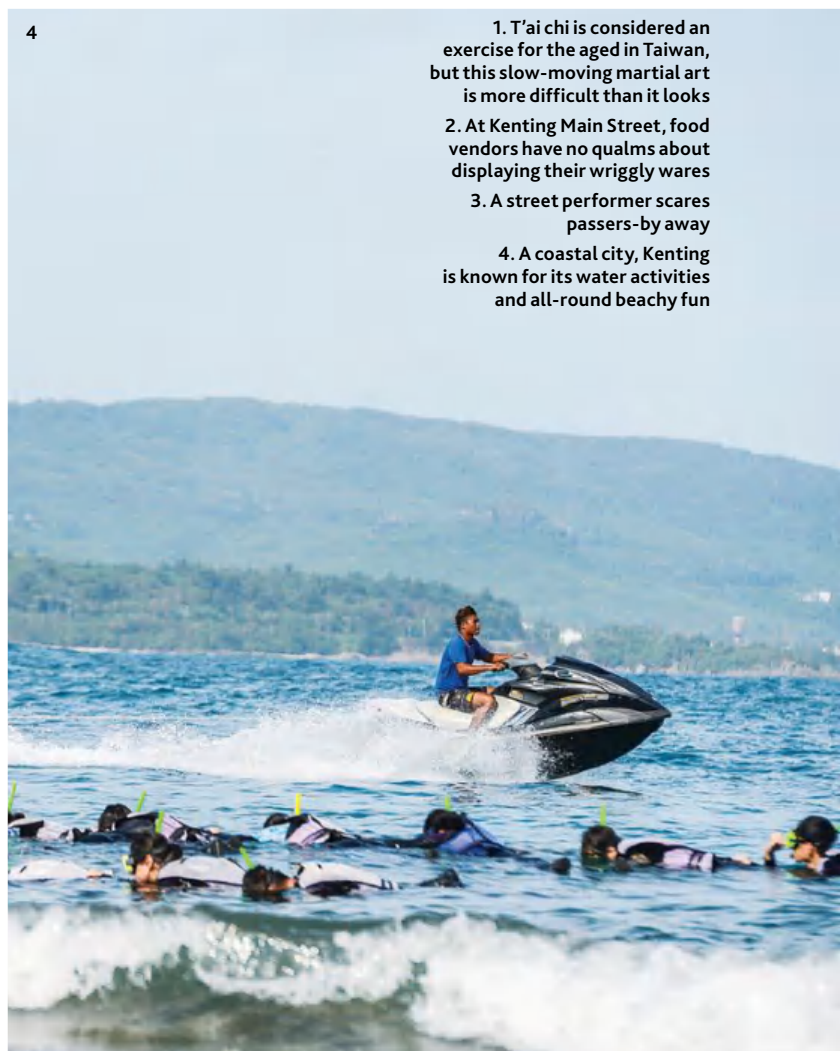
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4

1. T'ai chi is considered an exercise for the aged in Taiwan, but this slow-moving martial art is more difficult than it looks

2. At Kenting Main Street, food vendors have no qualms about displaying their wriggly wares

3. A street performer scares passers-by away

4. A coastal city, Kenting is known for its water activities and all-round beachy fun



1 & 2. Buddhism and Taoism are among the two most popular religions in Taiwan



‘The highlights of the collection are a 200-year-old cabbage and a lump of meat – both of which are surprisingly realistic jadeite carvings’

orchestrated by Chiang Kai-shek, who was beginning to get the feeling he was losing the war. The highlights of the collection, I am told, are a 200-year-old cabbage and a lump of succulent meat – both of which are surprisingly realistic jadeite carvings, in case you were wondering. Other attractions include Chinese paintings, ceramics, bronzes and samples of calligraphy. The pieces attract many Chinese visitors from the mainland who come to have a look at the stuff that, as our guide tells us, was stolen from them.

There's still a sense of gratitude all over Taiwan towards the former president, and, in Taipei, the **Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall** is a reminder of his contributions. A visit to the garden complex early the next morning presents me and photog Himanshu with the opportunity to witness a flag hoisting by some uniformed men in white. Since there are hardly any other people around, save for a few nonagenarians doing some seriously slow-motion t'ai chi, it feels like they're putting on the show just for us, and, in the soft morning light, the atmosphere is pretty darned tranquil.

The theme of tranquility continues at the Chinese-style **Lungshan Temple**, where there's a freakin' waterfall in the courtyard! I look up, expecting to find the artificial source of the spray, but I can't see it and so I'm easily convinced it's the real deal. (It probably isn't, but still.) Inside this 18th-century Buddhist temple, devotees line up in front of the idol chanting a hypnotic verse. To my right, a lady selects from a box a pair of *jiaobei*, red, half-moon blocks of wood, and begins to throw them on the floor like dice. The way they fall is supposed to answer a yes or no question

she has posed to the gods. She then rattles a bunch of long, flat *kau cim* sticks in a canister and picks out the one that pokes out from the rest. She reads the inscription on it, ponders for a moment, and does the whole thing all over again. Divination tools such as these are commonly used in Buddhist and Taoist temples across Taiwan. I understand the sentiment behind it. Sometimes when you're presented with one of life's doozies, it helps to have a little guidance from the other side, regardless of whether it's validated or not.

I could do with a couple of *jiaobei* myself.

SAND ME DOWN

It's late evening when we arrive in **Kenting**, a sleepy beachside town in Pingtung County. Actually, Kenting isn't a town at all – the whole thing is one big national park with lush green mountains, coral caves, a dream town with shopping and alcohol and some beaches thrown in for good measure. The region of **Kenting National Park** was once submerged under the sea, and the limestone caves in the Kenting Forest Recreation Area are proof of this. Get a closer look at the tropical flora here, and don't miss the neat banyan tree area, which has a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* vibe going on. At the top of the viewing tower from where you can see the tip of the island, look out for the giant rocks shaped like frogs and cats.

Driving along Kenting Main Street in **Hengchun**, the park's main town, I notice more of those *xiaochi* stalls lining the road that has turned into a night market post sunset. I make a mental note to come by later and try some of the stuff, and then do a double take. There's a girl selling 'frog egg drinks'. →

The black and sticky egg-looking things are really just tapioca balls, but are marketed as frog eggs because of the uncanny resemblance. I don't discover that until much later, though, and miss out on what might have been a tasty treat.

A late-night stroll down the street reveals skewered squid, banana pancakes, fried milk, shaved ice, steamed dumplings, beef noodles, unidentifiable meats and really cool cocktail mini-bars. Each one has its own atmosphere with dance numbers blaring from little speakers nearby and bartenders with more swagger than Jagger. Another phenomenon peculiar to the night market of Kenting is family-friendly pole-dancing clubs. Singles, couples and parents with kids have the time of their life as they watch a dancer pirouetting around a pole. It's not all scandalous, however. The show stops just short of indecent, and the attention is soon turned toward the audience. Willing guests then get their clothes taken off by said dancer and have frilly pink tutus stretched around their waists. Nothing like a little disrobing to ignite a child's imagination.

But Kenting is all about diversity. If you're not particularly keen on stripping off in front of your friends or eating slimy balls, you can opt to put on an unforgivingly clingy wetsuit and get thrown around in the water instead. Or even go snorkelling. There are lots of beaches that organise water sports (we chose **Houbihu**), no matter your predisposition. So you can nurse your tailbone after a thrilling ride on the Big Foot – this inflatable raft will have you clinging on for dear life as it's dragged across the water by a jetski – or you can opt to snorkel peacefully just metres away from the shore, where the coral and fishies are surprisingly colourful and exotic.

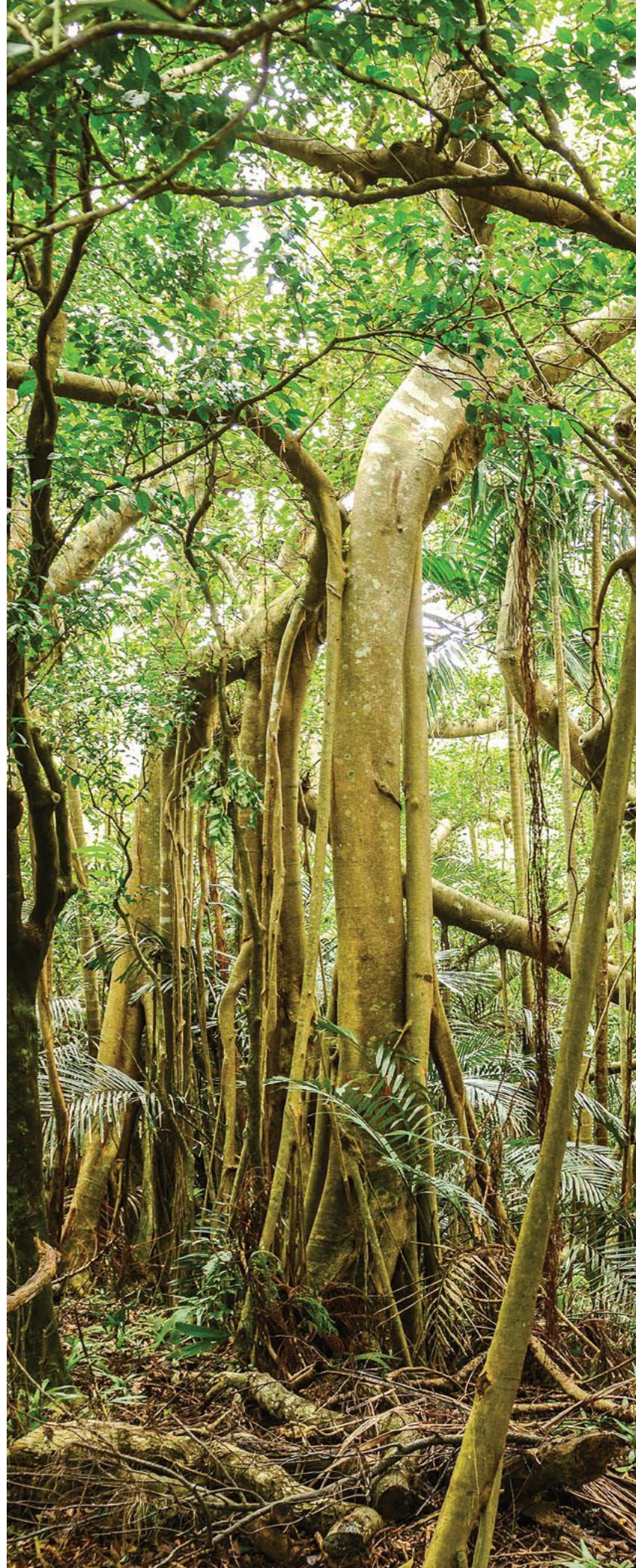
If you're like me and you enjoy touching things, you can even get your hands on some sea life at the **National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium**. Right up my alley. In the underwater viewing tunnel, a stingray smiles and spits some rocks out at me as it passes over my head. I'm told you can choose to spend the night here and watch them spit rocks all night long, if you so desire.

And in the beluga whale tank, Gibo is getting frisky with Angel. She's not interested though, even though Gibo's, umm, gibo is raring to go. They come unnervingly close to the glass and all around me kids are squealing in delight. I wonder if they can hear us. Best if they can't, or they'd know we're a bunch of blubbering halfwits.

A WHOLE LOT OF HOT AIR

I'm sitting inside an inflated joker ladybug. Okay, we're not *inside* her, just hanging below her in a disproportionately small rattan basket. As we begin to rise, I feel like a celebrity. People wave at me, take my photo. I flip my hair nonchalantly and pretend not to notice.

No one cares. Lady Joker (the balloon, not me) is the real star of the show. We're at **Luye Gaotai** for the Taiwan International Balloon Festival and the weather is just right. Twice a day, →



The Valley of the Hanging
Banyan in the Kenting Forest
Recreation Area
is two parts awesome
and one part slightly creepy



1. Hot-air balloons make a pretty sight across the field at the Taiwan International Balloon Festival
2. Care to spend a night under these babies? At the National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium, you can!
3. The fame of the Peking duck at Bian Yi Fang dates back to the Ming Dynasty. That's some seriously delicious duck
4. Remember those night markets? They'll do whatever it takes to get your attention



WATCH THE
INCREDIBLE
DRUMMERS OF
TEN DRUM
CULTURE VILLAGE
IN ACTION



***‘I feel gushes of warm air on my neck every time
he fires the burner... it feels like
I’m riding a dragon’***

for over a month, balloons take flight as onlookers stand around with their jaws hanging. Our particular balloon has been brought all the way from France and belongs to our very French pilot, Philippe Lusley. “Eh, *zis ees* your first time in ze balloon?” *Oui!* And I’m ecstatic. I feel gushes of warm air on the back of my neck every time he fires the snorting burner, and it feels like I’m riding a dragon. In the fields below, tiny farmers load tiny pineapples into tiny pick-up trucks and itty-bitty cars roll across the roads. The Central and Coastal Mountain Ranges flank the *gaotai*, literally high plateau, and the rising sun throws spears of light at everything.

This is **Taitung County** on Taiwan’s eastern coast, and we’re really beginning to enjoy the pace of life here. It’s the least populated place in the country, but has the largest population of aborigines and, as a seaside province, is known for its fresh seafood. And here’s an interesting titbit: during WWII, when Taiwan was still under Japanese rule, *kamikaze* (suicide pilots) would spend their last evening in Taitung with their girlfriends. In the morning, they would fly out to meet their fate, bombing American vessels in the Pacific. The town has a gorgeous coastline, the kind of mountainscapes that led the Portuguese sailors, who first spotted the island to yell out, ‘*Ilha Formosa!*’ (beautiful island). And seafood.

The Taiwanese believe that it’s better to have food left over than to see an empty plate – that just means your guests are still hungry. So they serve you lots... and then some. On the lazy susan during our first lunch here, there’s some *fung lua*, sea snails cooked in the local, mild style, *hetun*, the dangerous puffer

fish, and *xiaoyu jiantan simalinyu*, an omelette with baby fish thrown in for extra flavour. There is also a giant grilled red snapper, steamed prawns the size of my face, and bamboo shoots, in case you thought they’d forgotten their veggies.

The food across Taiwan has been largely influenced by China as well as Japan, and more recently, the USA. This is why you will find sushi alongside hakka noodles and a juicy beef steak. The Japanese and American influences can be seen in the clothes people wear, too, with kids dressing like anime characters and sporting Chuck Taylors. But that’s not to say Taiwan’s culture has been lost. Many subtle flavours in the food are still recognised by seasoned palates as distinctly Taiwanese, and even the language is very different from what’s used on the mainland. The written language is a whole different ball game altogether, made up of word characters (like Japanese *kanji*) instead of alphabets. As a matter of curiosity, I ask Peter just how many characters there are. He frowns and says there are more than even he knows, and for someone to be considered literate enough to read the newspaper, they need to know at least 40,000 characters. Imagine what their QWERTY keyboards would look like! He answers my question with a demo. Their solution is a drawing pad built into the phone that lets you draw out a character instead of scrolling through thousands to find it. It’s really quite ingenious.

As we drive along in the bus one evening, I notice a graveyard with a number of elaborate graves all pointing in different directions. This, Peter explains, →

1. The honour of performing on stage at the Ten Drum Culture Village is bestowed upon very few; only students who have practised for a minimum of six years are allowed

2. Lady Joker was the favourite at the 2015 Taiwan International Balloon Festival





1. The parade from the gates of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall complex to Ketagalan Boulevard takes place every year

2. This zebra-headed bombshell of a mannequin outside a bikini shop in Kenting had me at hello

‘Today, people also hire strippers for funerals, because they want it to be a happy occasion’

is because a lot of people still believe in Feng Shui, and the direction of their graves is determined by the time of their birth and death. He goes on to tell us of the current trend of hiring professional criers for a funeral to make it look like the deceased is much loved. “Today, people also hire strippers for funerals, because they want it to be a happy occasion,” he says bemusedly. Talk about a shift in culture.

In **Kaohsiung**, one of Taiwan’s biggest port cities, Taiwanese culture hasn’t gone anywhere, but, instead, has sort of been transformed into something new. At the **Pier 2 Art Centre**, art is taking on a new twist. Once a warehouse, it was abandoned when Kaohsiung saw the shift from being an industrial town to a service-based one. Now it houses some really great eclectic art by local and international artists. I judiciously avoid a large, shiny red sculpture of a dog-beast that is sure to give me nightmares, and make my way over to a huge mural of a 3D train station. There’s a cool breeze blowing in from the ocean and the coffee shops around the place have a merry air about them. I’d love to hang around and look at every piece of art, but we’ve got an appointment.

A percussion extravaganza awaits us at the **Ten Drum Culture Village**. In **Tainan**, about 45 minutes away from Kaohsiung, this old sugar refinery has become home base for a group of percussionists who have made it their life’s goal to promote the ancient Taiwanese art of drumming. We are treated to a drumming lesson before the show and our teacher, a pretty Taiwanese lady, patiently explains to us how to read the sheet music. We’re not very good, but she’s kind enough

not to say so, so we leave feeling pretty chuffed. She leads us to the auditorium for the show and what follows leaves me gobsmacked: a 30-minute performance of high-intensity, physically-exhausting drumming. The drummers are initially veiled by a gossamer screen and a single drummer sets the tempo. Halfway through, the screen is lifted to reveal the drummers standing in ankle-high water and that’s when the fun begins. They jump about shouting, water flying, all the while playing their drums. The momentum builds and rises to a crescendo. When the drumming stops, the audience is too dumbstruck to react. Then the applause breaks out and shouts of “Encore!” sound from the back. The performers come out and take a bow, and it’s all over. Too quickly, if you ask me. I could have sat there for hours.

Too quickly.

I could have applied that phrase to almost every experience I’ve had here in Taiwan. As we wave goodbye to Peter, the now familiar *xie xie* leaving our lips one last time, I wish I had done more. Taiwan, and I’m sure of this now, has more eccentricities than a roomful of my family members (and that’s saying something) and it has a quiet, no-bragging way about it that makes it even more likeable. When I look back at what I missed, I wonder if maybe I should’ve allowed myself to be stripped at one of those Kenting clubs, maybe I should’ve forgone sleep one night and stayed out to mingle with the adorable locals in Taipei, and maybe, just *maybe*, I should’ve gone ahead and eaten that stinky tofu. ☹



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES (MAIN PICTURE)

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Typhoon season (Jun–Aug) runs through the summer (Mar–Aug), so expect the unexpected. Autumn (Sept–Oct) is more pleasant and less humid. The low season runs from November to March, when discounts – barring on Chinese New Year in January – are highest.

GETTING THERE

Thai Airways, Jet Airways, Singapore Airlines and Air China fly to Taipei's Taoyuan Airport with one stopover from most major Indian cities (return fares from ₹ 37,800).

GETTING AROUND

Getting around Taipei and Kaohsiung is easy on the MRT. Maps are in English and the ticket machines are easy to use. In towns like Kenting and Taitung, you can rent a scooter from anywhere (₹ 400–₹ 800/day), though you might need an international licence. The Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) is very efficient for inter-city travel (www.railway.gov.tw/en/; Taipei to Kaohsiung: ₹ 1,300). The High Speed Rail (HSR) is good for travel along the west coast, though stops are limited (www5.thsrc.com.tw/en/; Taitung to Taipei: ₹ 1,600).

VISA

A visa for Taiwan takes up to four working days to process (www.taiwanembassy.org/visitor/visa: ₹ 3,225).

EMBASSY ALERT

Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India, New Delhi: www.roc-taiwan.org

CURRENCY

1 New Taiwan Dollar (TWD) = ₹ 2.02

FANCY A CURRY?

At Joseph Bistro, experiment with sea urchin kodi, a raw sea urchin dish (₹ 1,160), or just indulge in butter chicken (₹ 840) if you're missing home (00-886-2-2508-1329; 1F, No 13, Lane 69, Songjiang Rd, Taipei; lunch: 11.30am–2pm, dinner: 5.30pm–9pm; mains from ₹ 760).

VEG OUT

While veg options are limited, they are there. Night market *xiaochi* include veg options like stinky tofu and corn dogs. Some bigger eateries offer vegetarian options on their menu like spring rolls and sticky rice with vegetables.

WAYS TO DO TAIWAN

TAIPEI

STAY: It's worth splurging for the service at Mandarin Oriental (00-886-2-2715-6888; www.mandarinoriental.com; 158, Dunhua North Rd; from ₹ 31,400).

EAT: Shi-Yang Culture Restaurant is a swanky Chinese eatery and teahouse about an hour outside Taipei. It's inspired by all things Zen, and the food is delicately flavoured, fresh and unique, and, after the five-course, 10-dish meal, you'll probably resemble an agitated puffer fish (00-886-2-2646-2266; www.shi-yang.com; No 7, Lane 350, Sec 3, Xi Wan Rd, Xi Zhi Dist, Taipei County; 12pm–3pm, 6pm–9pm, Tues–Sun; set meal: ₹ 2,500 pp; advance bookings up to two weeks needed).

SEE/DO: National Palace Museum: 00-886-2-6610-3600; www.npm.gov.tw; No 221, Sec 2, Zhishan Rd; check website for timings; ₹ 500

Chang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall: 00-886-2-2343-1100; www.cksmh.gov.tw; No 21, Zhongshan S Rd, Zhongzheng Dist; 9am–6pm; free

Lungshan Temple: 00-886-2-302-5162; www.lungshan.org.tw; No 211, Guangzhou St; 6am–10pm; free

Guang Hua Digital Plaza: 00-886-2-2391-7105; No 8, Section 3, Civic Blvd; 10am–9pm

Taipei 101: 00-886-2-8101-8800; www.taipei-101.com.tw; 89F, No 9, Xinyi Rd, Section 5; 9am–10pm, last ticket at 9.15pm; ₹ 1,000 adult, ₹ 900 child

KENTING

STAY: Howard Beach Resort Kenting has cosy rooms and a tunnel to its private beach. It's a short walk to the night market (00-886-8-886-2323; www.kenting.howard-hotels.com; 2, Kenting Rd, Hengchun Town, Pingtung Hsieng; from ₹ 17,600 with breakfast).

EAT: Zhao Li is famed for its puffer fish (prepared by a licensed chef), and attracts locals and visitors alike. It's packed with visitors from the capital and nearby towns on weekends (00-886-8-889-6587; No 6, Kanglin Rd, Pingtung; 11am–2pm, 5pm–9pm, Thur–Tues; puffer fish: ₹ 560).

SEE/DO: National Museum of Marine Biology & Aquarium: 00-886-8-882-5678; 2, Houwan Rd, Cheuchung; 8am–6pm; ₹ 900 adult, ₹ 500 child

Kenting National Forest Recreation Area: 00-886-8-886-1211; www.recreation-forest.gov.tw; 201, Gongyuan Rd, Kenting Borough, Hengchun Township; 8am–5pm; ₹ 200 adult, ₹ 150 child

Chang Rong Water Sports Centre: 00-886-8-886-6388; No 123, Daguang Rd, Hengchun Township; package of three activities: ₹ 1,300 pp

TAITUNG

STAY: The Luminous Hot Springs Resort is close to the Hungye hot spring system –



CLICK TO VIEW ON GOOGLE MAPS

CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!

one of the best soda bicarb hot springs in Taiwan, and the water is piped directly to your room. Also visit the Mountain Spa and skinny dip in the common pool – ladies and gents separate. The hotel offers two tethered hot-air balloon rides a day (00-886-8-955-0888; www.imresort.hotel.com.tw/eng/; 200, Sec 1, Zhonghua Rd, Luye Township; from ₹ 17,600; hot air balloon: 5am–7am, 5pm–7pm; ₹ 1,980 pp).

EAT: Find a local eatery and settle down. Most here have a casual vibe – grab plastic bowls, chopsticks and condiments from a sideboard and place your order. The food is also likely to be typically Taiwanese, unlike the more widely-available Chinese cuisine.

SEE/DO: The Taiwan International Balloon Festival is held for 44 days a year. The dates are flexible.

KAOHSIUNG

STAY: The Ambassador in Kaohsiung wins for its location and cosy rooms. It's a stone's throw away from the picturesque Ai He (Love River). The Love River Park is also nearby, and there's a bicycle stand close to the hotel if you wish to rent one for a day of sightseeing (00-886-7-211-5211; www.ambassadorhotel.com; 202, Min Sheng 2nd Rd; from ₹ 15,000).

EAT: Peking duck never tasted better than at Bian Yi Fang, which does this dish really

well. As the duck is being served, waiters will come around to announce what is being done, so don't be alarmed if they holler in Chinese, "Now we are slicing the duck!" Also try the duck heart, duck soup and maybe even duck feet (00-886-7-531-9199; www.bianyifang.com; No 23, Penglai Rd, Gushan Dist; 11am–2pm, 5pm–10pm; Peking duck: ₹ 5,400).

SEE/DO: Pier 2 Art Centre: 00-886-7-521-4899; www.pier-2.khcc.gov.tw; No 1, Dayong Rd, Yancheng Dist, Kaohsiung; 10am–6pm Mon–Thur, 10am–8pm Fri–Sun

Ten Drum Culture Village: 00-886-6-266-2225; 326, Section 2, Wenhua Rd, Rende Dist; 9am–5pm, shows at 10.30am & 3pm; ₹ 600

Good to know

- Get someone to write down the name of your destination in the local language so you can show it to a local if you get lost. If you're travelling inter-city on either the TRA or HSR, make sure you get yourself a lunchbox at the station (from ₹ 200).
- If you visit Taitung when the hot-air balloon festival isn't on, you can still go for a ride. Sky Rainbow Airlines offers rides to guests all year round, weather permitting (00-886-8-955-2233; No 399, Zhonghua Rd, Section Luye Township; office hours: 9am–12pm, 2pm–5pm; untethered ride: ₹ 18,000).



The guides that take you on the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl are also accomplished actors



10

reasons to fall in love with

DUBLIN

(and that's excluding the whiskey)

Unusual sights, quiet corners, a whole lot of parties
and a predilection for the bizarre –
the capital of the Republic of Ireland's a surprisingly young city

WORDS RADHIKA LALLA | PHOTOGRAPHS VAIBHAV MEHTA

WHISKEY, admittedly, has a large role to play on our discovery of Dublin – as do more than a few pints of Guinness.

Pub-hopping through Temple Bar, Dublin's cultural (and party) quarter, Vaibhav and I don't quite know which way to look. Our senses are being bombarded – drunken conversations in a range of languages fight for space with the steady bass throb leaking out of the pubs, the nip in the autumn air's battling with the heat generated by the sheer mass of people around us, and we're probably no longer actually savouring the flavours of the varied drinks we're sampling (though we must keep pretending). For a city as old

and as storied as it is, Dublin sure knows how to party.

The round-the-clock *craic* (good time) isn't all this old-but-young city has going for it, though. With a large student population of aspiring Trinity College graduates, Dublin's got a range of great value experiences that make us love it all the more.

The big story that Dublin's got to share sounds quite familiar – it's one of perceived occupation, of a bloody struggle for independence, of finding its own feet as a newborn nation... As the capital of the Republic of Ireland and a focal point of much of the freedom movement before that, Dublin's seen its share of turmoil. In its more recent past, too, it's weathered a recession that saw it going from a brash up-and-comer in the European economic

scene to facing its highest levels of emigration since the Great Famine. But there was plenty of beauty that emerged from both the older 'troubles' and the more recent one – literature, music, poetry, innovative community initiatives, and, perhaps, most of all, an abiding love for the *craic*.

It's a recurring theme through our time here. As we unearth our favourite parts of the city, we accidentally find ourselves in the middle of a party time and again, whether it's with newly-made friends at one of James Joyce's favourite watering holes, or at a live public screening of an inter-county Gaelic football final that's as much a social occasion as it is a fierce display of team loyalty.

And it's all tied together by a penchant that 'Dubs', as the locals call themselves, have for the weird and the bizarre. →



Dubh Linn Gardens ❶ off Dame St
St Stephen's Green ❷ Fusilier's Arch,
 Grafton St, St Stephen's Green Square
Dublin Literary Pub Crawl ❸ starts
 from The Duke Pub, 9, Duke St
Howth ❹
Powerscourt House and Gardens ❺
 Powerscourt Estate, Enniskerry,
 County Wicklow
Glendalough ❻ Bray
George's Street Arcade ❼ Dublin 2

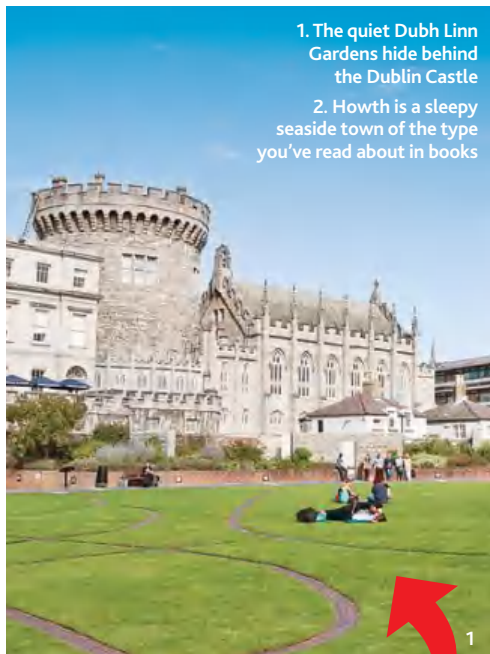
Grafton Street ❽ between
 Trinity College Green
 and St Stephen's Green
The Croke Park Stadium
 ❾ Drumcondra
GAA Museum ❿ Cusack
 Stand, off Clonliffe Rd, St
 Joseph's Ave, Croke Park
Science Gallery Dublin
 ⓫ Naughton Institute,
 Trinity College, Pearse St

The Irish House Party ⓬
 The Lansdowne Hotel,
 27, Pembroke Rd
**Kilmainham Gaol Historical
 Museum** ⓭ Inchicore Rd,
 Kilmainham
The Little Museum of Dublin ⓮
 15, St Stephen's Green,
 near the corner of Dawson St
Teddy's Ice-Cream ⓯ 1A,
 Windsor Terrace, Dun Laoghaire

Trinity College Dublin ⓯ College Green
St Patrick's Cathedral ⓰
 St Patrick's Close
Christ Church Cathedral ⓱
 Christchurch Place
The Chester Beatty Library ⓲
 Dublin Castle
Jameson Distillery ⓳
 Bow St, Smithfield Village
Dublin Writers Museum ⓴
 18, Parnell Square



1. The quiet Dubh Linn Gardens hide behind the Dublin Castle
2. Howth is a sleepy seaside town of the type you've read about in books



1 BECAUSE OF THE SWATHES OF GREEN YOU'LL FIND EVERYWHERE

I find it hard not to love a city that loves its open spaces, and Dublin has its share of these. A great place at which to grab a breather, **St Stephen's Green** is perhaps the most popular of the lot, with a duck pond, a pretty gazebo, and even a garden for the blind, made up of scented plants and with Braille signage. Still, on a warm summer day, you'll be hard-pressed to find a quiet spot among the visitors and students 'studying', which is why the **Dubh Linn Gardens** wins our vote for 'best place to lie in the grass' instead. Sited behind the imposing Dublin Castle near the Chester Beatty Library, this is the original location of the *dubh linn* – dark pool – that gave the city its name. While it's not as big as the Green, it's ideal for a quick outdoor lunch-and-snooze stop (which is what you'll spot many a local doing), with plenty of space for everyone. While taking in the modern sculptures that pepper the grounds, pay your respects at the quiet corner with a bust of slain investigative journalist Veronica Guerin. And do keep an eye out for visitors from the skies – the paths that meander through the gardens form a Celtic pattern when looked at from above, marking it out as a helipad!

Dubh Linn Gardens: www.dublincastle.ie; off Dame St; 10am – 4.45pm Mon – Fri, from 2pm Sat – Sun; free
St Stephen's Green: <http://ststephensgreenpark.ie>; Fusilier's Arch, Grafton St, St Stephen's Green Square; 7.30am – dusk Mon – Sat, from 9.30am Sun; free



2 BECAUSE OF THE DRAMA ON ITS STREETS

We're attracting a few stares as our ragtag bunch traipses noisily across the night-darkened streets in front of the hallowed halls of Trinity College, strangers getting acquainted in that fast-track way a glass or two of whiskey demand you do. We stumble to a stop as the drama suddenly unfolds in front of us. Our affable guides have transformed into the rowdy working-class men from an older Dublin that escaped the drudgery of their lives with a nightly visit to the pub, singing a song in a brogue that's almost unintelligible. Then suddenly, their words make sense again, and they continue to tell the story of Dublin's heritage and the legacy of the many wordsmiths who called it home.

The guides with the **Dublin Literary Pub Crawl**, who we've just learnt are accomplished actors in their own right, share tales of their city and its rich literary history in a unique and engaging way, mixing in the facts and information with readings from Irish classics, dramatisations of life in ye olde Dublin and stops for a dram (you *were* warned about the whiskey!) at pubs where greats like James Joyce and Patrick Kavanagh drowned their sorrows. We're not going to reveal the tour's route or its secrets – those are for you to discover – but we will tell you that the very least you'll end the night with is a list of great pubs to revisit!

Dublin Literary Pub Crawl: 00-353-1-670-5602, 00-353-87-263-0270; www.dublinpubcrawl.com; starts from The Duke Pub, 9, Duke St; 7.30pm daily
 Apr – Oct, 7.30pm Thur – Sun Nov – Mar, the tour lasts for about 2 ¼ hours; tickets ₹ 835, drinks extra

3 BECAUSE IT'S A BREEZE GETTING OUTDOORS

A change of pace is as easy as hopping aboard the DART, Dublin's local train service, and heading north towards the seaside town of **Howth** (which rhymes with 'both'). The village is sited on Howth Head, an outcrop immortalised in Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Make like we do and spend the morning strolling along the shore and pier avoiding the boisterous waves: an excuse to justify the fresh seafood we've got planned for lunch. Pubs and cafés abound at the waterfront; there are even carts selling fish-and-chips if you want something more affordable.

If you've got wheels and a yen for more of the outdoors, visit the very English **Powerscourt House and Gardens**, or, for something more active, drive to the Wicklow Mountains. There's a walking trail, the 130-odd-km-long **Wicklow Way** that meanders through the range (which takes about a week to walk end-to-end); we've taken the easy way out and clubbed a few hours' walking with a visit to the remnants of the medieval monastic settlement of **Glendalough** that the trail passes. →

Getting to Howth: Take the DART from Dublin's city centre (www.irishrail.ie; single fares from ₹ 220), or Bus 31a from Talbot Street toward Howth Summit (www.dublinbus.ie; single fares from ₹ 230)
Powerscourt House and Gardens: 00-353-1-204-600; <http://powerscourt.com>; Powerscourt Estate, Enniskerry, County Wicklow; 9.30am – 5.30pm
 Mar – Oct; gardens: ₹ 600
Wicklow Way: www.wicklowway.com
Glendalough: 00-353-40-445-325; www.glendalough.ie; Bray; 9.30am – 6pm mid Mar – mid Oct, till 5pm mid Oct – mid Mar; ₹ 200

4 BECAUSE THE SHOPPING CAN BE AFFORDABLE...

You can hardly miss it, an imposing, red-brick building that sprawls over what looks like a block of Dublin real estate. That, we're told, is **George's Street Arcade**, home to a wealth of kitschy souvenirs, vintage clothing, eclectic, old-school music stores – where you might even stumble upon old LPs, fresh flowers and food, books... This market's been running since 1894, and its customers are a healthy mix of locals and visitors. If your tastes run more high-street, follow the crowds down **Grafton Street**, Dublin's prime shopping street, where brand-name stores – think Zara, H&M, Prada – and cheerful cafés jostle for your attention. Fun fact – this street's produced many a busker who's gone on to have a successful career, including musicians Damien Rice and Paddy Casey.

George's Street Arcade: 00-353-1-283-6077; www.georgestreeta arcade.com

Dublin 2; 9am – 6.30pm

Mon – Wed and Sat, till 7pm Thur – Fri, 11am – 6pm Sun

Grafton Street: www.graftonstreet.ie; between Trinity College Green and St Stephen's Green



5 ...AND THE GAMES ARE REALLY FUN

Let me put it out there – Gaelic games are complicated and can be rough-and-tumble. There are sticks called 'hurleys' that you balance a ball on while running about, shoulder-to-shoulder charges (with no protective gear) are par for the course, and the Gaelic version of football's sort of like Aussie Rules (but don't ever let the Irish hear you say that). The **Croke Park Stadium**, HQ of the Gaelic Athletic Association, and the on-site **GAA Museum** is where we go to wrap our heads around the evolution and rules of the Gaelic games of hurling, Gaelic

football, *camogie* (a version of hurling played by women), rounders and handball, and to test our (pitiful) hurling and Gaelic football skills. Stadium tours are also offered; for great views over Dublin, splurge on the **Croke Park Roof Top Tour** along the **Skyline**.

The Croke Park Stadium: 00-353-1-819-2300;

www.crokepark.ie; Drumcondra; check website for tour schedules; tour: € 875, with museum entry

Etihad Skyline Croke Park Roof Top Tour: <http://skylinecrokepark.ie>; € 1,395, with museum entry

GAA Museum: 00-353-1-819-2323; Cusack Stand, off Clonliffe Rd, St Joseph's Ave, Croke Park; check website for timings; € 420

6 BECAUSE WE ALL HAVE AN INNER GEEK

We're like kids let loose in a toy store – surrounded by buttons to push, levers to tug and dark rooms to sneak into, and looking around for a responsible adult to give us permission to go forth and experiment. But then again, the wonders that wait at the **Science Gallery Dublin** tend to garner that response, and it seems like the smiling volunteers manning the exhibits are used to this regression. Set up in what used to be a car park before 2008, Science Gallery Dublin calls itself a "living experiment that bridges art and science" through its ever-changing roster of exhibitions and events that focus on real-life applications of and interactions with scientific discoveries. There's no permanent exhibition, though – check the schedule before visiting!

Science Gallery Dublin:

00-353-1-896-4091;

[https://dublin.science](https://dublin.sciencegallery.com)

[gallery.com](https://dublin.sciencegallery.com); Naughton Institute, Trinity College, Pearse St; check website for schedule of exhibitions and timings, Mon closed; free



PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES (CAMOGIE)

7 BECAUSE DUBS KNOW HOW TO PARTY

It's a crash-course in traditional Irish song and dance we're after, and we find it at **The Irish House Party**. I'll admit to a bit of scepticism – it sounds like a bit of a tourist trap – but I'm happily proven wrong.

You start the evening off with a three-course meal before proceeding to the theatre, where the All Ireland champion instrumentalists, singers and dancers do their bit. You can pick between doing the meal-and-show deal or skipping the dinner – our advice? Grab a bite to eat elsewhere and use the money saved on a pint or three post the show. The performers put on a lively show, showcasing traditional Irish instruments, folk songs and Irish dancing, including a fascinating bit with a broom.

Cheesy? Sure. Fun? Definitely. →

The Irish House Party: 00-353-84-356-9781; www.theirishhouseparty.com; The Lansdowne Hotel, 27, Pembroke Rd; dinner seating: 7pm, show starts at 8.30pm; dinner and show tickets: ₹ 3,425, show only: ₹ 1,750

We did mention the fascinating bit with a broom...

Facing page:

1. Buskers are an integral part of Grafton Street's atmosphere
2. Hurling and camogie are typically Irish sports
3. The Science Museum Dublin's full of intriguing displays – this one focuses on illusion



8 BECAUSE YOU CAN GO TO JAIL FOR A DARK THRILL

A visit to the eerie **Kilmainham Gaol Historical Museum** offers a more rounded understanding of the darker side of the history of Dublin and the then newly-created Irish Free State. Built to be the city's 'new' jail in 1796, this was where legions of Irish rebels were held prisoner in unimaginable situations, and was also the site of the execution of some of the leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916. The stories told by the museum's knowledgeable tour guides contribute as much to the chills we feel as the dank interiors.

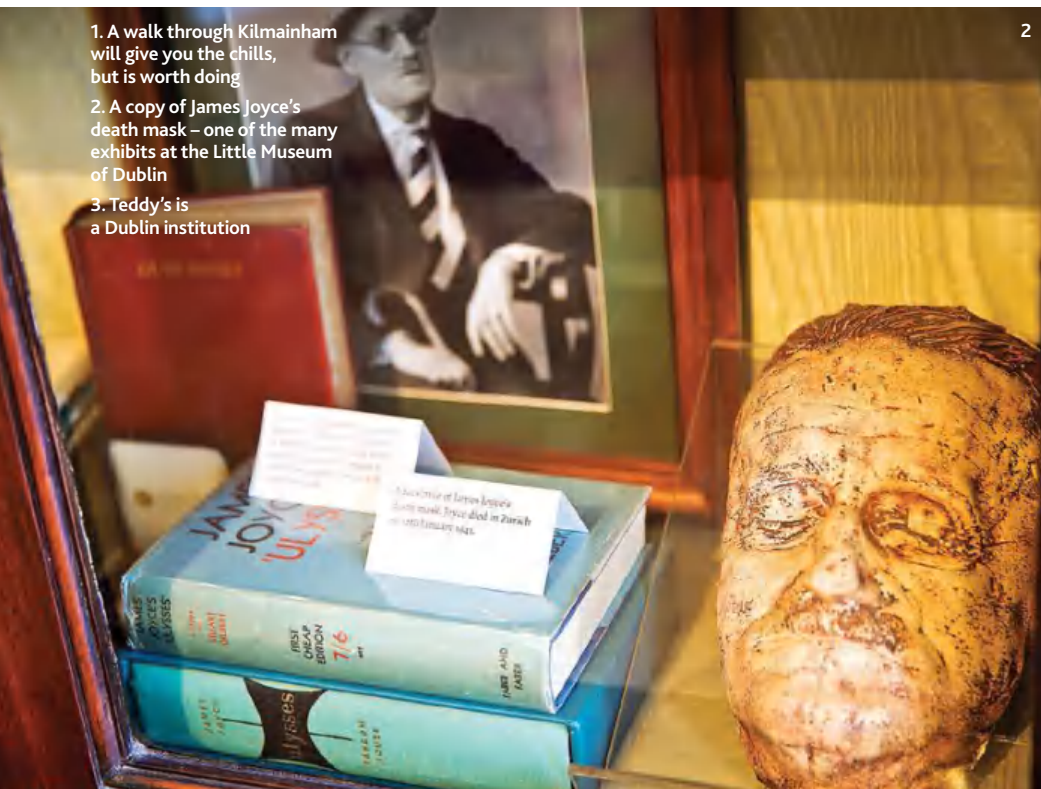
Kilmainham Gaol Historical Museum: 00-353-1-453-5984; www.heritageireland.ie; Inchicore Rd, Kilmainham; 9.30am–6pm Apr–Sept (last entry 5pm), 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat (last entry 4.30pm), Oct–Mar, 10am–6pm Sun (last entry 5pm); some sections closed till Jan 2016, reduced fee: ₹ 490 adult, ₹ 210 child



1. A walk through Kilmainham will give you the chills, but is worth doing

2. A copy of James Joyce's death mask – one of the many exhibits at the Little Museum of Dublin

3. Teddy's is a Dublin institution



9 BECAUSE ITS TREASURES HIDE IN THE LITTELST PLACES

Tucked away on the first floor of a gorgeous Georgian house, **The Little Museum of Dublin** focuses on showcasing the city as it grew in the 20th century. The charming collection includes photos and memorabilia of everyday life as it was – toys, machinery, letters, and the like – with an aim to capture a moment in time of Dublin's history. Our favourite part? The museum also runs the City of a Thousand Welcomes programme – get in touch with them before your visit, and they'll connect you with a Dub, who, over a free cup of tea or pint, will help you best plan your time in the city.

The Little Museum of Dublin: 00-353-1-661-1000; www.littlemuseum.ie; 15, St Stephen's Green, near the corner of Dawson St; 9.30am–5pm Fri–Wed, till 8pm Thur; from ₹ 490 adult, ₹ 315 child (3–18 years), child under 3 free

10 BECAUSE THE BEST DAYS END WITH ICE CREAM

Any day that ends with ice cream is a good day, especially when it's no-frills vanilla lapped off a cone as you sit by the sea. Follow the locals to **Dun Laoghaire Pier** for an early evening stroll, and treat yourself to a '99': a soft swirl of vanilla ice cream in a cone, with a half-bar of Flake stuck into it, from **Teddy's**, a South Dublin institution. We ask around, but no one knows why it's called a 99 – theories include connections to an Italian king's elite guard, and the address of a shop in Scotland that claims to have first started this practice. Then we dive in and it no longer matters, as we're left greedily considering if we should spring for a second Flake to stick into the dripping goodness, or if we'll have the time to get ourselves a second helping just to be certain it's as good as it seems.

That's often the way things are with the simple pleasures of life.®

Teddy's Ice-Cream: 00-353-86-452-9394; www.teddys.ie; info@teddys.ie; 1A, Windsor Terrace, Dun Laoghaire; 99: 10am–9pm; from ₹ 140



Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Dublin is charming all year round, though the weather's perhaps at its most amenable in the summer months, from June to August. This is also when prices will be at their highest. The Gaelic football match finals generally occur in September, and timing a visit to coincide will allow you to witness Dubs being even more rambunctious than usual.

GETTING THERE

Air France, Lufthansa, Emirates, Swiss and Turkish Airlines fly to Dublin Airport, with a stopover from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 47,750).

GETTING AROUND

Dublin's city centre is easy to get around on foot. For longer travel, hail a taxi – the yellow-blue signs are hard to miss (flag-down fare from ₹ 360). Public transport consists of the DART, the suburban rail system, the Dublin Bus and LUAS, the light rail tram, whose Red Line passes several sights. Pick the Short Hop pass that most suits you (www.irishrail.ie; from ₹ 800) or a Leap Card, which you can load with travel credits. Dublin also has a pay-as-you-go bike service (www.dublinbikes.ie; from ₹ 360/ three days, first half-hour of use free).

VISA

Under the newly-implemented British Irish Visa Scheme, Indians can visit both Ireland (the Republic) and the United Kingdom using either a valid UK or Irish visa. A single-entry short-stay visit visa to Ireland costs ₹ 4,100 (VFS service charge: ₹ 1,641), and takes around 10 working days to process.

EMBASSY ALERT

Embassy of India, Dublin: www.indianembassy.ie

CURRENCY

€ 1 = ₹ 72

GOOD TO KNOW

Consider getting yourself a Dublin Pass, which allows you free entry to a range of Dublin attractions, discounts and offers, fast-track entry to certain attractions, a free guidebook and even airport transfers! (www.dublinpass.com; one-day pass: ₹ 2,825)

Dublin has no shortage of places at which to grab a drink and meet new people



CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!

WAYS TO DO DUBLIN

STAY

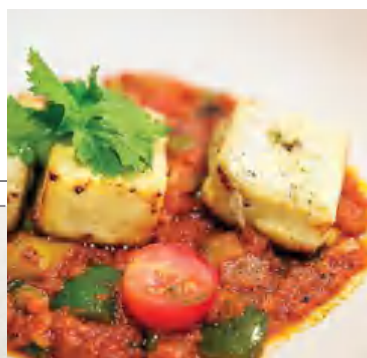
Though not too easy on the pocket, **Brooks Hotel** is centrally located and has well-appointed rooms, making it a good bet if you want to be at the heart of the action (00-353-1-670-4000; www.brookshotel.ie; reservations@brookshotel.ie; Drury St; from ₹ 15,200, check website for offers).

EAT

Drop by **Simon's Place** for a great-value meal; on offer are a range of sandwiches, soups, salads and juices, as well as baked treats (00-353-1-679-7821; George's Street Arcade, South George's St; 8.30am–5pm Mon–Sat; sandwiches from ₹ 375).

Fancy a curry?

The food at **Jaipur** does well to sate your cravings for a taste of home. One of the pricier Indian options in the city, certainly, but it's well worth it! (00-353-1-640-2611; https://jaipur.ie; 35, Main St; Ongar Village; 5.30pm–11pm Tues–Sun; mains from ₹ 940)



ESSENTIALS

You cannot visit Dublin and not pay a visit to **Trinity College Dublin** (below). Opt for the tour, guided by students of the college. While you're there, don't miss checking out the **Book of Kells**, just one of the treasures housed in the college's **Old Library** (00-353-1-896-1000; www.tcd.ie; College Green; check website for tour

schedules and timings; student guided tour with entry to the Old Library and the Book of Kells: ₹ 940).

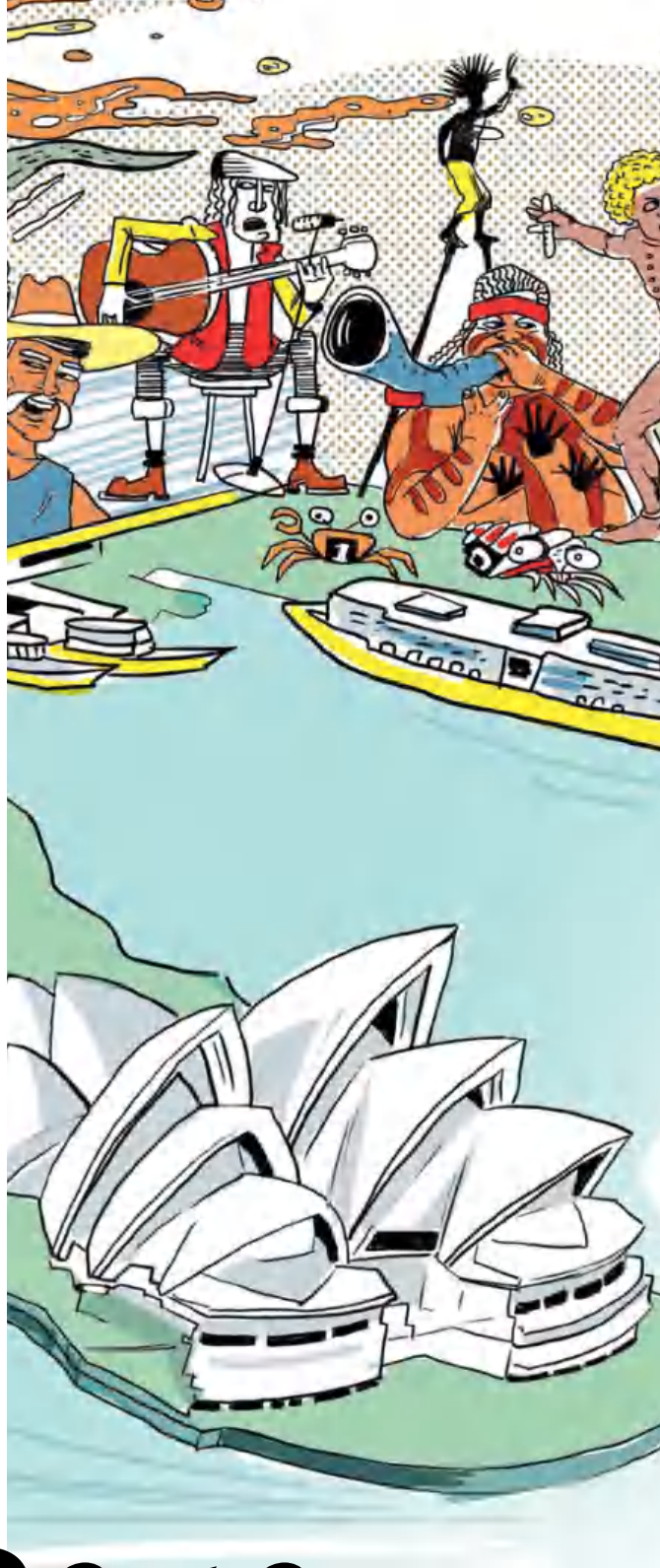
Dedicated to the country's patron saint, the stately **St Patrick's Cathedral** is worth visiting (00-353-1-453-9472; www.stpatrickscathedral.ie; St Patrick's Close; check website for timings; ₹ 435), as is **Christ Church Cathedral** (00-353-1-677-8099; https://christchurchcathedral.ie; Christchurch Place; check website for timings and mass schedules; ₹ 435).

The **Chester Beatty Library** houses a trove of ancient literary treasures (00-353-1-407-0750; www.cbl.ie; Dublin Castle; 10am–5pm Mon–Fri Mar–Oct, closed Mon Nov–Feb, from 11am Sat, 1pm Sun year round; free).

Visit the **Jameson Distillery** for a taste of how Ireland's most famous whiskey comes to be (00-353-1-807-2355; www.jamesonwhiskey.com; Bow St, Smithfield Village; 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, from 10am Sun, first tour 10am, last tour 5.15pm; ₹ 1,085, ₹ 975 when booked online).

The **Dublin Writers Museum** celebrates the country's literary history (00-353-1-872-2077; www.visitdublin.com; 18, Parnell Square; 10am–4.45pm Mon–Sat, from 11am Sun; ₹ 540).

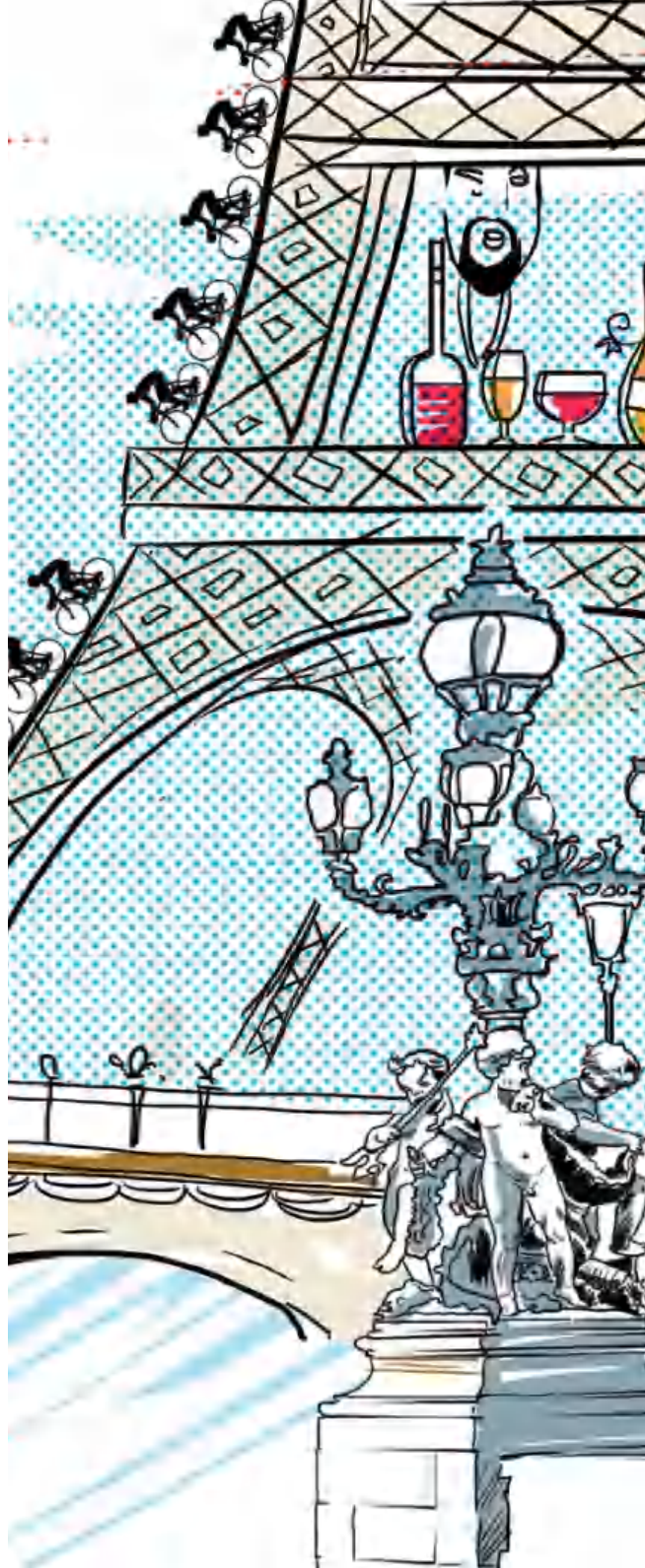




5 Cities on the Cheap

CLICK ON THE
LINKS TO FIND
OUT MORE!





London, Paris, Sydney, New York City and Tokyo have never been cheap to travel to. From eclectic excursions in London and Paris to secret NYC, Sydney on foot and a culture-laden Tokyo, we've mapped-out itineraries which will help you discover it all without going broke

COMPILED BY: NADEZNA SIGANPORIA | ILLUSTRATIONS: S SHETTY



Tokyo

DAY 1

Familiarise yourself with this crazy city through a free tour of Toyko accompanied by volunteer guides, organised by the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO). There are various groups listed with the JNTO to choose from (www.jnto.go.jp). You can also book a free guide for the day from **Tokyo Free Guide**, another group of local volunteers eager to help you discover their city (www.tokyofreeguide.com).

DAY 2

Start your day with early-morning Zen meditation at **Toshoji International Zen Centre**, a session that includes Zazen

(meditation in a Zen posture), *sutra* chanting and a cleansing (www.homepage3.nifty.com/toshoji). Then head out for a different experience at the **Tokyo Trick Art Museum**, filled with 3D artwork and visual illusions (www.trickart.info; ₹500 adult, ₹300 child). Bring out the geek in you at the **Tokyo Anime Centre** in Akihabara. You have to be a die-hard fan to enjoy this one (www.animecentre.jp). Finally, spend the early evening exploring the stunning landscaped gardens of **Rikugien Park**, one of Tokyo's most beautiful (6-16-3 Hon-komagome, Bunkyo-ku; ₹150).

DAY 3

Head out to **Arashio Beya**, a Sumo stable,



to watch a *keiko* – traditional Sumo practice session (www.arashio.net). Then continue on to the beautiful **Sensō-ji**, which contains a golden statue of Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy (www.senso-ji.jp). Tour the grounds of the **Imperial Castle**, and don't miss the iron *Nijū-bashi* and the stone *Megane-bashi* bridges (www.sankan.kunaicho.go.jp). On Sundays, you can rent a cycle and hit the 3km cycling course around the grounds, which runs from the Iwaida Bridge to Hirakawa Gate (www.jbpi.or.jp). End your day at **Origami Kaikan**. The studio also does some free demos, and has a shop and gallery (www.origamikaikan.co.jp; entry free, classes from ₹ 600).

DAY 4

Start your day with a visit to the creepy **Meguro Parasitological Museum** for a look at its somewhat grotesque collection of parasites (www.kiseichu.org). Cool off at the **Rinshi-No-Mori Park** where the towering trees have been growing for more than 100 years (www.tokyo-park.or.jp)

[or.jp](http://www.tokyo-park.or.jp)) or head to the fantastic **Yoyogi Park**, especially fun on Sundays. During the summer months, cultural festivals, live concerts and music performances, flea markets and farmers markets are held within the park (www.tokyo-park.or.jp). Visit the beautiful **Meiji Jingu Shrine**, right near the park. The grounds are dotted with pretty trees and walkways, a teahouse, pond and quiet spaces in which to relax (www.meijijingu.or.jp). Leave Tokyo with memories of breathtaking panoramic views from the observation decks of the **Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building**. On a clear evening, you might even be able to see all the way to Mount Fuji! The South Observation Deck has views of Odaiba District and should be visited during the day, while the North Observation Deck is perfect for evening views (www.metro.tokyo.jp). →

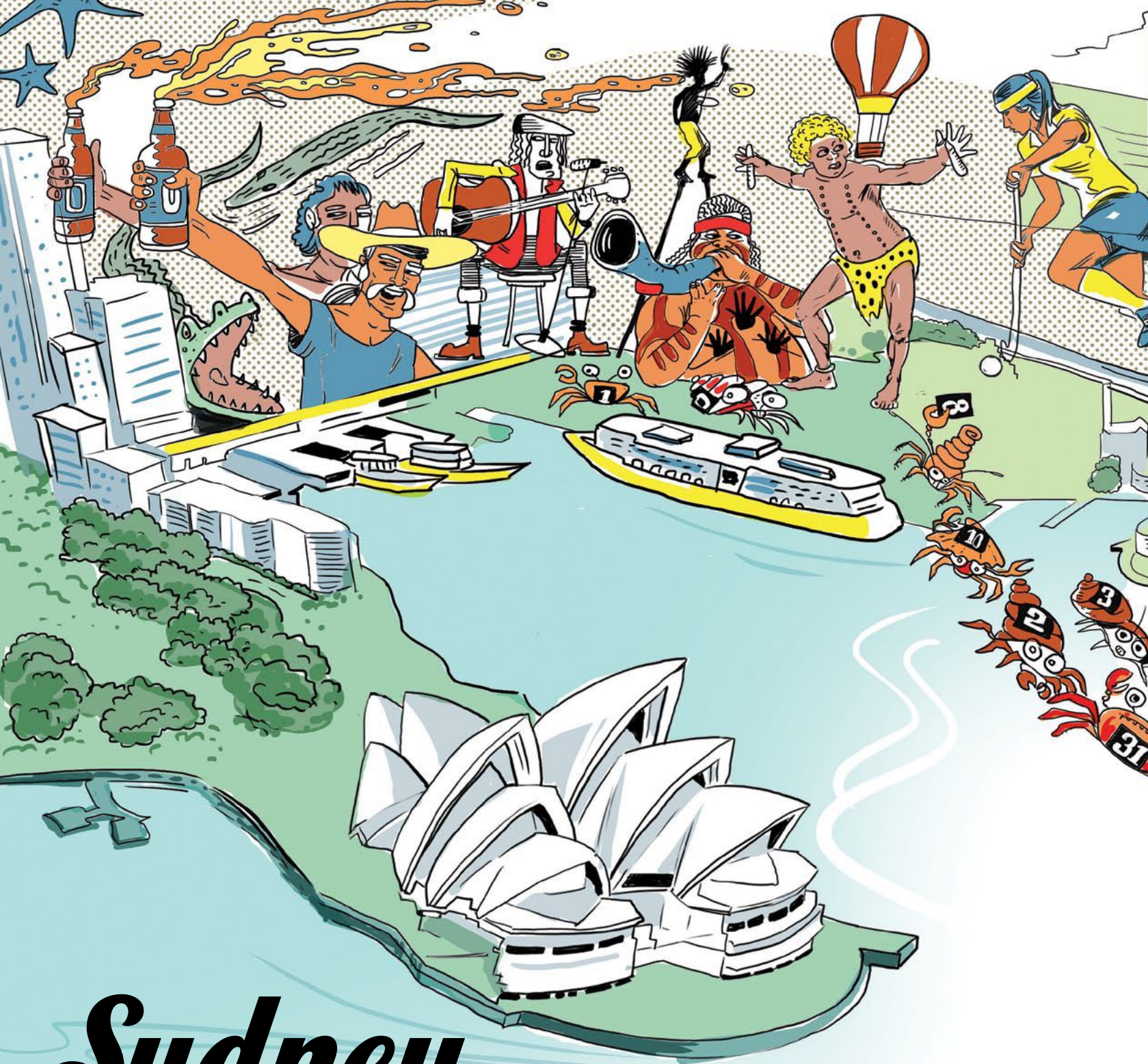
STAY

The **Sakura** hotels and hostels across the city offer clean and comfortable

accommodation (www.sakurachotel.co.jp; private twin room from ₹ 4,500).

GOOD TO KNOW

- If you are travelling to couple of places in Japan, get a **JR Pass**.
- For cheap souvenirs and shopping, go to **Daiso** (100-yen shop).
- Prices shoot up during Sakura – cherry-blossom season (Mar – Apr).
- Beer bought from vending machines or a 7-Eleven will be half the price than at a bar.



Sydney

DAY 1

Sydney is the perfect city to explore on foot, and that's been made easy with the **Sydney Harbour Circle Walk**, which is essentially a 60-odd-km circle footpath that can be walked in its entirety or in sections linked by public transport. Spend your first day here discovering the city and her major attractions with the help of this mapped-out route, which meanders along the

gorgeous harbour, into the bushlands and along historic roads. The entire walk takes anywhere between eight and 10 hours to complete, but you can break it up into four sections, from Circular Quay to Greenwich, Greenwich to Woolwich, Huntleys Point to Balmain and, finally, Balmain to Circular Quay (www.walkingcoastalsydney.com.au). Spend the evening taking it easy at the **Redfern night market**,



which has food vendors, live music and more (www.redfernnightmarkets.com.au).

DAY 2

Spend today enjoying Sydney's coastline and spectacular beaches. Laze around on famous **Bondi Beach** or take a stroll along the promenade. Pack sandwiches and head out on the **Bondi to Coogee Coastal Walk**, which offers beautiful ocean views and passes secluded beaches and gorgeous rock-pools. You will see the aboriginal rock carvings in **Marks Park**, one of the walk's highest points – also great for whale-watching from May to November. The route then leads to **Tamarama** via the small **Mackenzie's Point Beach**, where you can take a breather while enjoying the view. Go on to **Bronte Beach**, then to the historic **Waverley Cemetery** and **Clovelly Beach** which is a great spot to take a swim. The trail then leads up a steep staircase to **Gordon's Bay** and, finally, to **Coogee**, where you can relax in the parklands (www.sydney.com).

DAY 3

Spend this morning understanding the city with an **I'm Free walking tour** led by a local guide who will delve into the city's history and fish out interesting anecdotes (www.imfree.com.au). Next, head to the

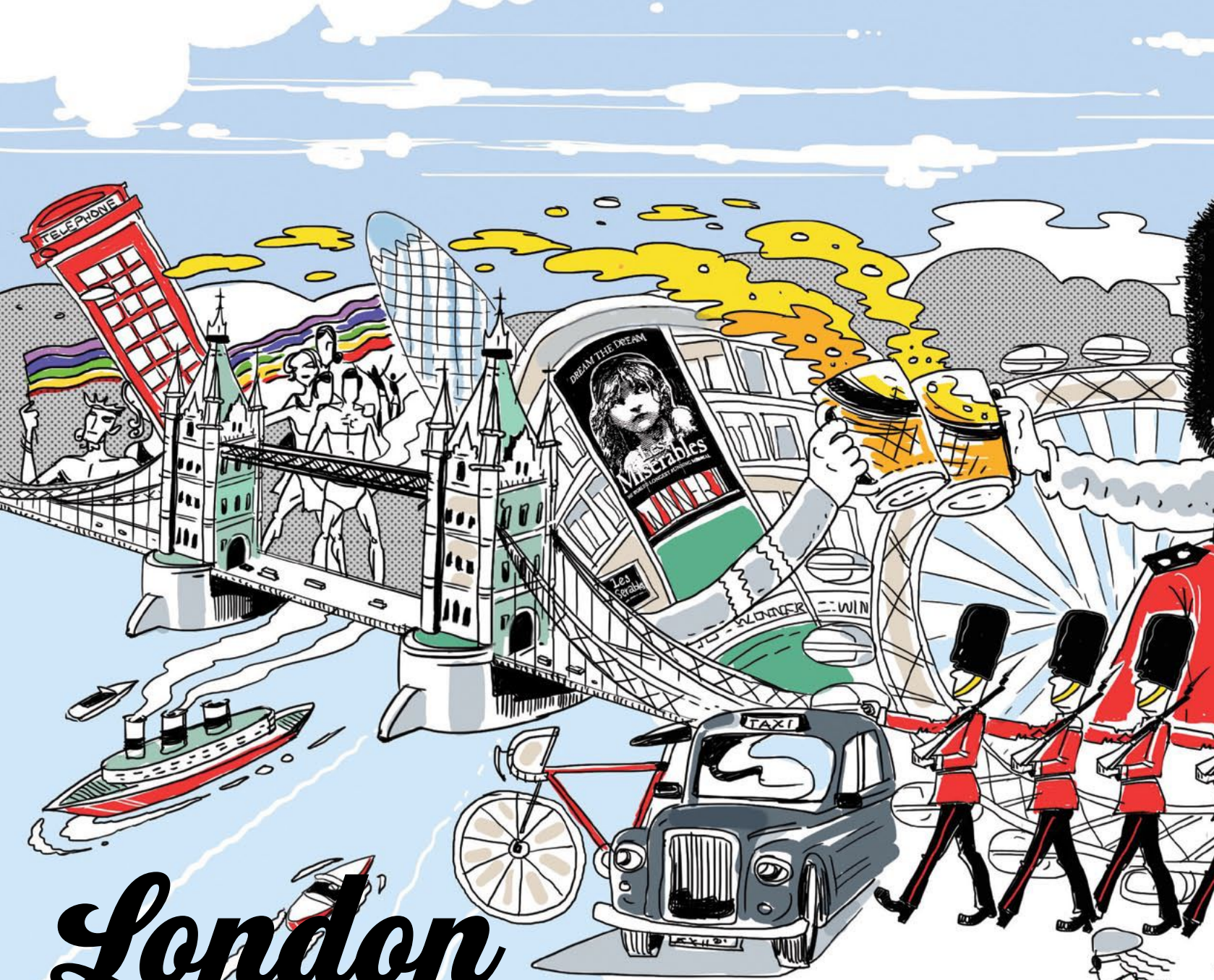
Art Gallery of New South Wales, which houses an extensive collection of Australian and aboriginal art as well as European and Asian masterpieces (www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au). Spend the afternoon roaming the beautiful **Royal Botanic Gardens**, after which you can plonk down in a shady spot for a picnic (www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au). End your trip to this sun-kissed city with exquisite evening views from the **Sydney Harbour Bridge**. →

STAY

Bounce Hostel Sydney has comfy shared dorm and individual rooms (www.bouncehostel.com.au; shared dorms from ₹ 1,620/ person, private rooms from ₹ 7,100/ two).

GOOD TO KNOW

- **Free shuttle bus services** operate in Sydney, Parramatta and Wollongong, which can be boarded at stops with the green shuttle logo. No ticket is needed (www.transportnsw.info).
- If you're in Sydney on a Sunday, you and your family can enjoy unlimited travel all day for ₹ 120pp in the Sydney, Newcastle, the Blue Mountains, the Central Coast, Hunter and Illawarra areas, by train, bus, ferry and light rail (www.transportnsw.info).



London

DAY 1

Start your exploration with a walking tour. Try one of **Sandeman's New London Tours** (www.newlondon-tours.com) and **Free London Walking Tours** (www.freelondonwalkingtours.com) which uncover the city's history while hitting the major sights. After your jaunt across the city, picnic at one of the many gorgeous royal parks like **Hyde Park**, **Kensington Gardens**, or **St James's Park**. There are tonnes of free events held at most of these (www.royalparks.org.uk). Spend your evening laughing away at a comedy show. **The Angel Comedy Club** in Camden has free shows every day (www.angelcomedy.co.uk). If that's not your thing, pick from one of the many themed tours that **London Walks** has on offer across the city (www.walks.com; ₹ 1,010).



DAY 2

Spend this morning exploring the city's free museums. **The Natural History Museum** has a fantastic dinosaur gallery (<http://nhm.ac.uk>) and the **British Museum** has the likes of Parthenon sculptures and Egyptian mummies to gawk at (www.britishmuseum.org). At the **Museum of London**, you can discover the city's ancient past (www.museumoflondon.org.uk), while at the **Victoria and Albert Museum**, you get to see some of the world's greatest art (www.vam.ac.uk). For a little bit of quirk, head to the **Sir John Soane's Museum**, which is filled with unusual curios, period furniture and exquisite paintings (www.soane.org) or the **Grant Museum of Zoology**, which houses a vast collection of specimens. The museum also holds free screenings of cult monster movies followed





by a complimentary glass of wine and a tour of the museum (www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/zoology). A lot of these free museums are open late on specific days – **Tate Modern** is open till 10pm on Fridays and Saturdays, and **Tate Britain** is open till 10pm, generally on the first Friday of every month (www.tate.org.uk). Once you're done, it's time to sample some of the city's tastiest offerings at one of its fantastic food markets like the **Borough Market** (<http://boroughmarket.org.uk>). Next, head to **The Scoop**, a sunken amphitheatre where scores of free events like live music performances, plays and film screenings are held almost every evening in the summer (www.morelondon.co.uk). Make sure to be done by 9.30pm for the **Ceremony of Keys** at the **Tower of London**. This 700-year-old locking-up ceremony takes place daily and is so popular

that it is booked solid for months – book in advance (www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon).

DAY 3

Spend the morning off your feet and discover the city by bus. **Bus Route 4** and **Bus Route 88** are perfect, cheap ways to get some sightseeing done as they take you past some of London's star sights – you can use your Visitor Oyster card. Then, head to **Camden** for an evening of bargain shopping. Harry Potter fans should make a beeline to King's Cross Railway Station, where you can take a photo pushing a trolley in to Potter-land at the wall marked 'Platform 9 ¾'. For that quintessential pub atmosphere, end with a night at one of the many traditional **Samuel Smith** breweries located around the city. Drink up – a night

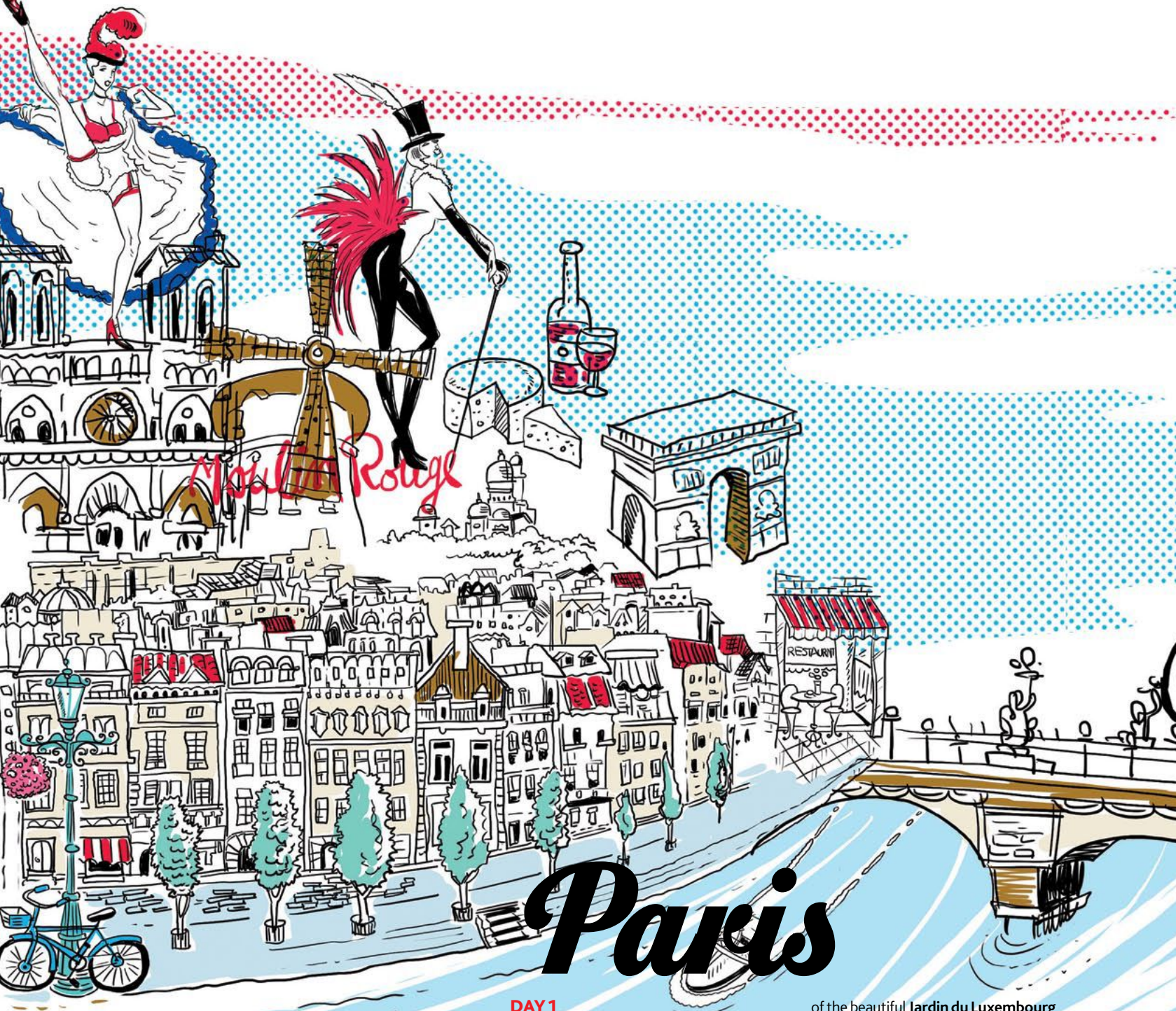
out here is really light on the wallet (www.samuelsmithsbrewery.co.uk). →

STAY

Good, budget (for London standards) stay options include the comfortable though slightly tiny-roomed **Avo Hotel** (<http://avohotel.com>; from ₹ 8,985). **PRO TIP:** Trawl **Airbnb** (www.airbnb.com) and pick a place in a neighbourhood not in the centre of London, where stay will be cheaper. (As will be the pubs!)

GOOD TO KNOW

- Check out www.visitlondon.com for various offers, discounts and hotel deals.
- Buy the **London Pass** (www.londonpass.com) for discounted rates on sightseeing and the **Visitor Oyster card** (www.visitbritainshop.com) for discounts on travel.



Paris

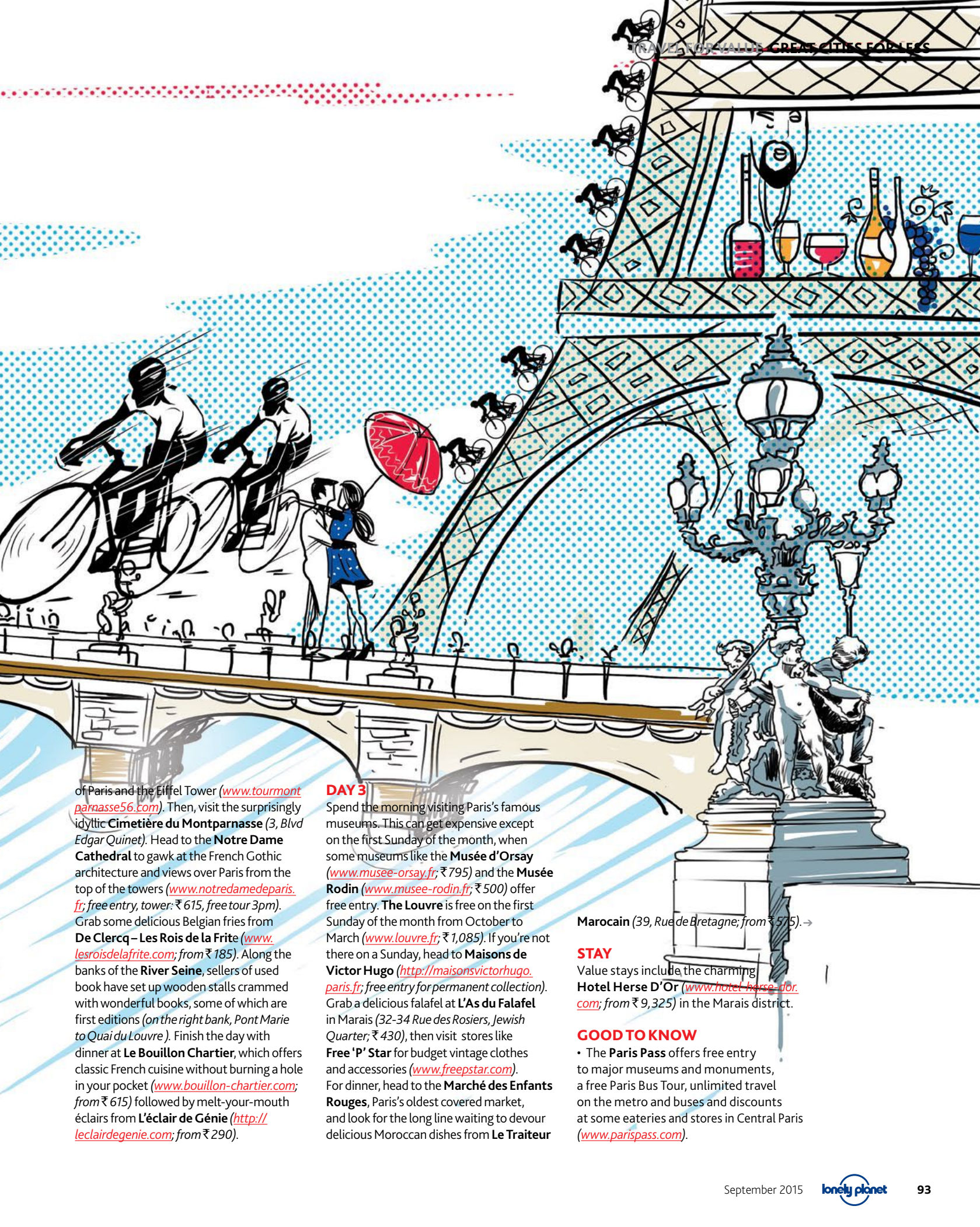
DAY 1

Start your Parisian sojourn with a guided walking tour – the **Classic Paris Walking Tour** is a great introduction to this beautiful city, and hits the main sights like the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre and views over the Champs-Élysées (<http://paris.classicwalks.com>; ₹ 1,445). **Sandeman's New Paris Tours** (www.newparistours.com) and **Discover Walks** (www.discoverwalks.com) also offer great free guided walking tours (*do tip*). Lunch at **Au P'tit Grec**, a tiny eatery known for its delicious crêpes (<http://auptitgrec.com>; from around ₹ 360). Work off those calories by heading out to take in the views of Paris from **Parc des Buttes-Chaumont**. It's quite a hike, but the views are worth it (<http://en.parisinfo.com>). You can also laze around on the lawns

of the beautiful **Jardin du Luxembourg** (www.senat.fr/visite/jardin) located in the heart of Paris, or explore the city from **La Promenade Plantee**, a tree-lined elevated walkway (<http://en.parisinfo.com>). Grab a quick bite at **Higuma**, well known for its ramen (<http://higuma.fr>). Spread out a blanket on the manicured lawns of **Parc du Champ de Mars** at dusk and wait for the light show at the Eiffel Tower.

DAY 2

Spend this morning exploring the eerie underworld of the **Paris Catacombs** and walking through 2km of the tunnels, which are lined with bones and skulls (www.catacombes.paris.fr; ₹ 720), before heading up the 56 floors of the **Montparnasse Tower** to the café for spectacular views



of Paris and the Eiffel Tower (www.tourmontparnasse56.com). Then, visit the surprisingly idyllic **Cimetière du Montparnasse** (3, Blvd Edgar Quinet). Head to the **Notre Dame Cathedral** to gawk at the French Gothic architecture and views over Paris from the top of the towers (www.notredamedeparis.fr; free entry, tower: ₹ 615, free tour 3pm). Grab some delicious Belgian fries from **De Clercq – Les Rois de la Frite** (www.lesroisdelafrite.com; from ₹ 185). Along the banks of the **River Seine**, sellers of used books have set up wooden stalls crammed with wonderful books, some of which are first editions (on the right bank, Pont Marie to Quai du Louvre). Finish the day with dinner at **Le Bouillon Chartier**, which offers classic French cuisine without burning a hole in your pocket (www.bouillon-chartier.com; from ₹ 615) followed by melt-your-mouth éclairs from **L'éclair de Génie** (<http://leclairdegenie.com>; from ₹ 290).

DAY 3

Spend the morning visiting Paris's famous museums. This can get expensive except on the first Sunday of the month, when some museums like the **Musée d'Orsay** (www.musee-orsay.fr; ₹ 795) and the **Musée Rodin** (www.musee-rodin.fr; ₹ 500) offer free entry. **The Louvre** is free on the first Sunday of the month from October to March (www.louvre.fr; ₹ 1,085). If you're not there on a Sunday, head to **Maisons de Victor Hugo** (<http://maisonsvictorhugo.paris.fr>; free entry for permanent collection). Grab a delicious falafel at **L'As du Falafel** in Marais (32-34 Rue des Rosiers, Jewish Quarter; ₹ 430), then visit stores like **Free 'P' Star** for budget vintage clothes and accessories (www.freepstar.com). For dinner, head to the **Marché des Enfants Rouges**, Paris's oldest covered market, and look for the long line waiting to devour delicious Moroccan dishes from **Le Traiteur**

Marocain (39, Rue de Bretagne; from ₹ 575). →

STAY

Value stays include the charming **Hotel Herse D'Or** (www.hotel-herse-dor.com; from ₹ 9,325) in the Marais district.

GOOD TO KNOW

- The **Paris Pass** offers free entry to major museums and monuments, a free Paris Bus Tour, unlimited travel on the metro and buses and discounts at some eateries and stores in Central Paris (www.parispass.com).

NYC

DAY 1

Start your trip with a **Big Apple Greeter Tour**, perfect for orienting yourself and getting to visit NYC's greatest hits with a 'greeter'. Tell them beforehand which areas you would like to visit and what your interests are, and they'll customise a tour for you (www.bigapplegreeter.org). Rest your feet at the **Brooklyn Botanical Gardens** where you can enjoy the afternoon among over 40,000 plants from around the world (www.bbg.org; ₹ 800; free entry on Tues, Sat [10am–12pm] and winter weekdays [Dec–Feb]). Spend the evening doing something a little bizarre – take a **Light-Saber Fighting** choreography class organised by the New York Jedi (www.newyorkjedi.com; ₹ 650/ class).

DAY 2

Spend the morning admiring the colourful walls of the playground of the **Jackie Robinson Educational Complex**, established as the Graffiti Hall of Fame for street artists, both new and established, to legally display their art ([www.streetsare sayingthings.com](http://www.streetsare Sayingthings.com)). Get your geek on at the **Sony Wonder World Technology Park**, which has a four-storey interactive technology and entertainment museum to keep you busy for hours (www.sonywonder techlab.com). Once you're done, head to the **Museum of Modern Art** (www.moma.org; ₹ 1,650, 'Free Friday Nights' from 4pm–8pm). End the day with spectacular evening cityscape views from aboard the **Staten Island Ferry**. The route offers views of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline (www.siferry.com).

DAY 3

Start the day with a trip to **Governor's Island**; the ferry ride offers wonderful cityscape views (ferry round trip: ₹ 120). There's a bike path (rent bikes at the ferry landing from ₹ 1,000/ two hours), picnic area and sites like **Admiral's House**, **Castle Williams**, the star-shaped **Fort Jay** and **Nolan Park** to visit (www.gov island.com). The **Liggett Terrace Food Court** (daily) and **King Avenue** (weekends) have eateries and stalls serving delicious food. Then head to Brooklyn for a **Street Art tour of Bushwick** to marvel at fantastic graffiti by local and international talents (www.freetoursbyfoot.com). After the tour, head to **Brooklyn Museum** for its excellent art collection. **Target First Saturdays** offers free art and entertainment programmes (www.brooklynmuseum.org; Target First Saturday: 5pm–11pm first Sat

of the month except Sept). Wrap things up at the **Brooklyn Academy of Music** for an evening of free live music. Its **BAMcafé Live** programme runs from September to May on select Friday and Saturday nights (www.bam.org).

DAY 4

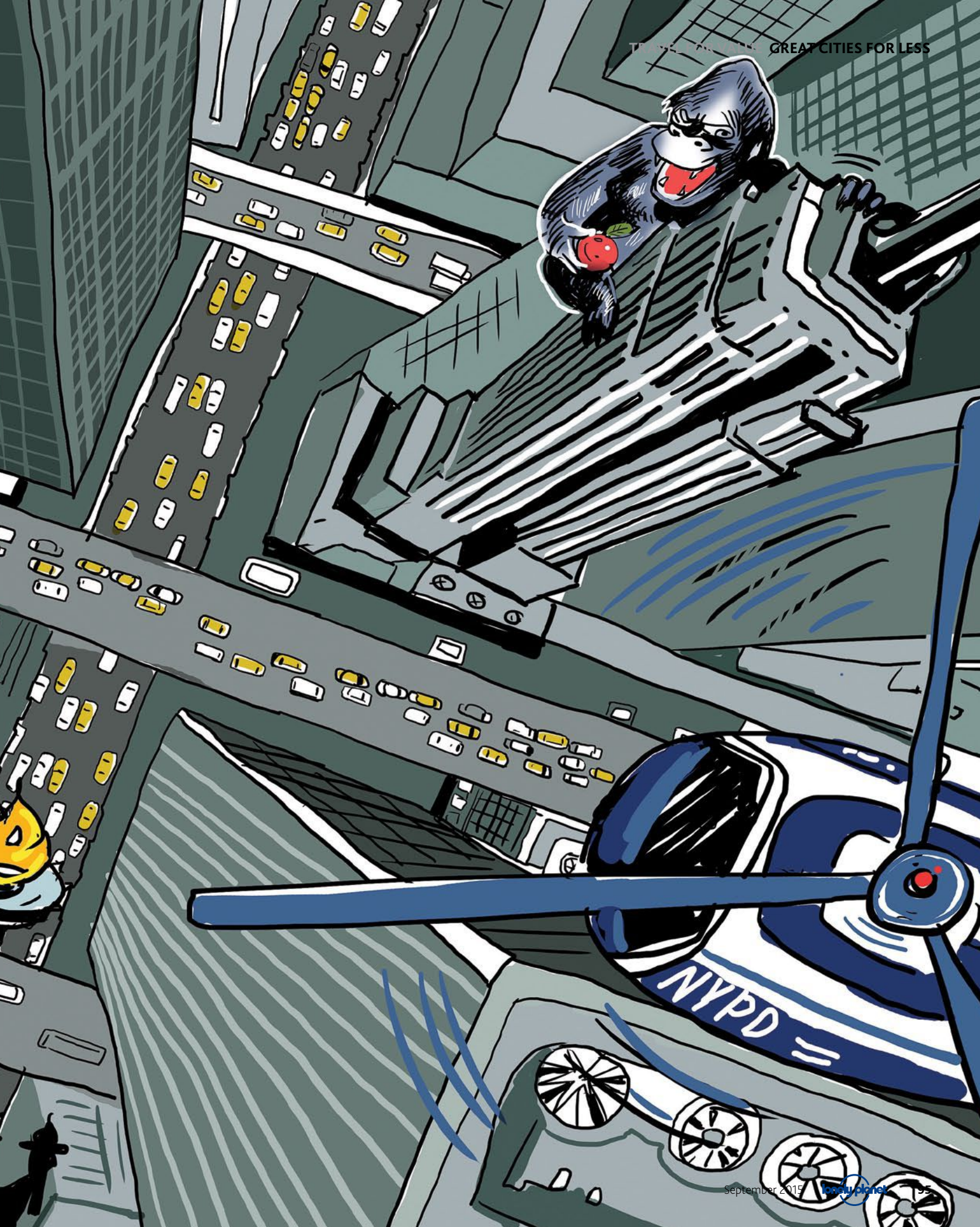
Start your day exploring the **Brooklyn Flea Market** in **Williamsburg**, which has over 100 vendors selling all things vintage, antique and handmade and 30 food stalls offering everything from mouth-watering lobster rolls to *tamales* (www.brooklynflea.com; Sun). Then head to **Brooklyn Brewery** for a 40-minute tour of the facility and follow it up with a quick taste of superb brews (www.brooklynbrewery.com). If you're still not full or tipsy – and even if you are – your next stop should be the Williamsburg waterfront at East River State Park for the **Smorgasburg food market**, where you'll find everything from creamy ice cream and cheesecake to pan-Asian fast bites and barbecued meats (www.brooklynflea.com; Sun).

STAY

The Bowery House is a good budget option. The cabins are a tad small but comfy; all have shared bathrooms and amenities like free wi-fi (www.theboweryhouse.com; queen cabin from ₹ 6,400).

GOOD TO KNOW

- Purchase a **Metro Card** for discounted travel (www.web.mta.info) and a **City Pass** for discounts on tickets to six major sights (www.citypass.com).
- **Central Park** hosts free plays and concerts in the summer with the 'Shakespeare in the Park' programme (www.publictheater.org). In fact, free events are held in a range of parks in the summer, ranging from movie screenings, game events and dance workshops to concerts and plays (www.nycgovparks.org).
- For discounts on Broadway shows, buy your tickets at the **TKTS booths** for shows on the same day (www.tdf.org).





More than misal

Food in Maharashtra is a smorgasbord of deceptively simple flavours and textures, showcasing local produce and ingredients with an ease that countries aiming for neighbourhood sourcing can only envy.

Warning: Whether you're vegetarian or non-vegetarian, do not read this on an empty stomach

WORDS PRIMROSE MONTEIRO DSOUZA | PHOTOGRAPHS T KRISHNA PRABAKAR

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OUT MORE!





Food in the Malvan region is redolent with coconut, like in this *tisrya masala* in the making at Maachli



Traditionally dressed in *pheta* (turban) and *dhoti*, this gentleman was curious about Krishna's need to photograph everything. Facing page: The *thali* at Durvankur, Pune, is yours at a discount of ₹ 30 if you don't leave anything on your plate.

WHAT does it say about a place that, when you sit down to write about a journey of over two weeks, you can't pick a single person who stands out? All you can recall in your mind's eye is a procession of *thalis*, or well-battered plates, brought to your table by shadowy figures that you don't really register. There's mutton on that buffet of memories, in soothing gravies and a startlingly piquant *loncha*. There's an army of vegetables and pulses, simply dressed with minimal spice and garnish. There's fish, dusted with semolina, and mussels cooked in the heartiness of coconut and onion.

Food in Maharashtra is usually easy and quick to pull together, because traditionally, before the advent of the big cities, women across the state worked alongside men on the farm and had to get something together with little effort; the seasoning and garnish was likewise always something close at hand and seasonal, like herbs from the garden. Across the world, chefs are making a song and dance about using only ingredients sourced from within a 100-mile radius; across Maharashtra, local produce is procured and used with an ease that is a legacy of generations.

If we were to divide Maharashtra into a food map, five regions stand out – Vidarbha, Marathwada, Konkan, Paschim and Uttar Maharashtra. Paschim includes Pune and Kolhapur, Konkan encompasses Malvan, Vengurla and Mumbai, Marathwada has Aurangabad and its neighbours, Uttar Maharashtra includes Nashik and Jalgaon, and Nagpur is the food capital of Vidarbha. Marathwada and Uttar Maharashtra must wait their turn; our journey took us through the Paschim and Konkan regions and we managed to do a tasting of Nagpuri food. The sheer physical size of this state – comparable to Italy – spanning areas coastal and inland, hilly and flat, explains the variety of ingredients and preparations we encounter. We wonder how much of an impact its settlers over the years have had: Mughals, Gouds, Parsis, Siddis... the list is as vast as the state itself.

Everywhere, we found things both familiar and unfamiliar: a fondness for mutton in Kolhapur, a proficiency in cooking with seafood along the Konkan coast, a largely vegetarian diet in keeping with the Brahmin-ness of the Pune community, but also a light hand with the spices, a freshness that comes from never overcooking the ingredients and a hearty appetite among the locals that speaks well for the variety on offer.

What does it say about a place, a state even, that, when you sit down to write about a journey of over two weeks, you can't pick a single person who stands out?

It says that the food is rather brilliant.



PUNE VEGETARIAN AND LOVING IT

IT may be one of Pune's foremost temples to the sweet, but don't be expecting sunshine and smiles at **Chitale Bandhu Mithai Wale**. This is polished efficiency at its best. The way to work it is to conform – take the paddle the security guard hands you, sneak a quick, furtive glance at the *barfis* and *halwas* on offer, have each of your purchases mysteriously logged onto your paddle by taciturn serving gentlemen, and pay at a counter manned by equally grumpy ladies (wait, one smiled, but no doubt she will be taken to task for that slip later).

Your strategy should be to buy and run.

You can smile later when you're biting into your crisp, flaky *bhakerwadi* and your sugar-laden *chirote* – while still wondering how such brilliance can come out of such an intimidating, even unfriendly, food establishment.

Aniruddha Patil would caution both against such fulsome praise and such snap judgements. For the founder of **Pune Eat Outs**, set up in 2005, consistency is key to a restaurant or food outlet's success, and he warns that, in these days of peer-reviewed exploration, knee-jerk praise or criticism can unfairly damage a culinary business. And, as someone who probably knows the city's food scene inside out, his opinion counts. Pune Eat Outs now embraces 10,000 food lovers, and Aniruddha's pride in Pune's food scene is palpable. What place does



GOOD TO KNOW.

Aniruddha Patil's Pune Eat Outs is one of the easiest ways to access home cooks. "We have close to 30 brilliant home cooks across Pune." (puneeatouts.in)

• Aniruddha's *thali* recco: **Badshahi**. "This place has been frequented by students and families alike. People wait a long time for a table and brave the effervescent but sometimes brusque owner just for the great food."

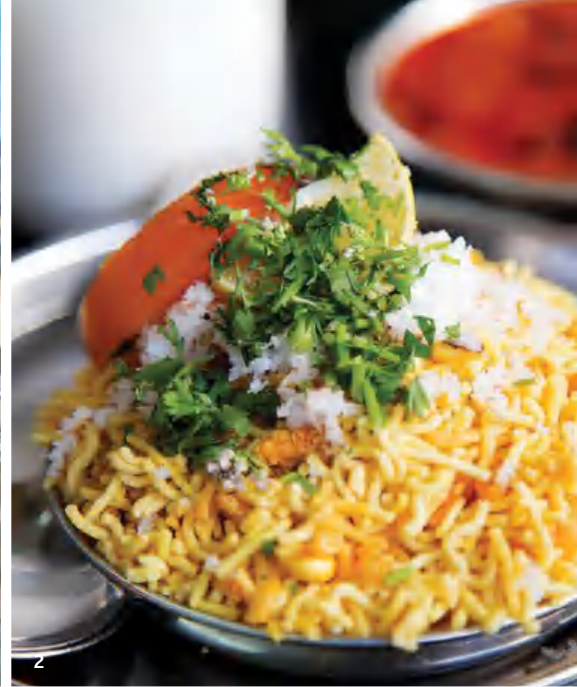


local food have in the global cornucopia that the city offers today, we ask. "Regional, rustic food is the new gourmet revolution," he tells us. The key lies in rediscovering the food we've always known, the food our grandmothers cooked for us.

In Pune, the revolution has been a long time coming. Indian grandparents perhaps could not see the logic of going out to eat what you could cook at home. Still, there were always the dining halls, usually attached to boarding houses, where men – predominantly bachelors or widowers – could get their fix of 'home food'.

The oldest of this kind is **New Poona Boarding House**, a large, airy dining hall on the first floor of a nondescript building diagonally opposite Perugate Police Chowky, started by the grandfather of Suhas Udpikar, who admonishes us to "talk later, eat now when the food is hot." At this 90-year-old establishment, ₹ 90 gives you an unlimited vegetarian *thali*, and, as befitting this dining hall's venerable age, many of our 52 fellow diners seem almost similarly aged. One gentleman has been eating here daily for 50 years, watched over by Suhas's grandfather, then his father and now, for the last 35 years, by Suhas himself. We're wondering where he eats on Fridays, when New Poona Boarding House shuts shop for the day.

Eating local in Pune means giving our usual fave area – Koregaon Park – a wide berth. Instead, we drive up and down →



1. The food is always traditional and delicious at the 90-year-old New Poona Boarding House
2. The *misal* with *matki* at Shree Upahar Gruha was among the best we tasted
3. Tamanna's cheese *dabeli* is a must-not-be-missed take on a classic
4. Shreyas is well-known for its *thalis*, but don't hold back on ordering the *puran polis* and *modaks* off the à la carte menu
5. Jangali Maharaj Road is stubbornly one-way, but worth the pain for the eateries you will find branching off it

Facing page:

1. Lime juice and *taak* at Bedekar; you'll need them to cool off the heat of the *tari* topping the *misal*
2. Mahajit at Tamanna is generous with the cheese



Jangali Maharaj Road and Fergusson College Road, both one-ways, before losing ourselves in the lanes in and around Sadashiv Peth, the stronghold of Maharashtrian food in the city. The warren of streets totally defeats Kunjamma, our travelling companion. If she were with us as more than just a disembodied Google Maps voice leading us astray, she would probably have been unceremoniously ejected from the car at the second misdirection. As it is, she must be silenced and allowed to reroute and recalculate before we give in and ask for more sensible human intervention – though ‘sensible’ is a matter of debate, given the average Puneekar’s need to be helpful even if they don’t really know how to get you where you want to go.

One such round-and-about journey gets us to **Bedekar Tea Stall** to be confronted with a mass of people waiting for their names to be called by Anil Bedekar. He’s the outside face of the two brothers who make up the third generation of the Bedekars who have run this bustling one-room eatery since 1954. His brother Aalhad is the man who presides over the kitchen, and the two brothers are keepers of the secret of the ‘*sample*’ (gravy) that makes Bedekar’s Puneri *misal* the institution it is. As Manali, Aalhad’s wife, explains, all *misals* have the *chivda* and *usal* in common; it is the *sample* that makes this slightly sweeter version different. Covering all bases, the layered delicacy also comes topped with a spicier *tari* (gravy), which can be ordered on the side by ladies and children, who are thought



to be less likely to be able to handle spice. The whole enterprise is self-service; you pay a token amount of ₹ 100 and then settle extras later. Extras could include *taak*, lime juice, *solkadi* and *kokum sharbat* – all served in what seem like slimmer versions of old milk bottles.

By evening, we dine with Aniruddha at **Mathura** – known, he tells us, for consistently good traditional vegetarian food. It is one of the best places at which to sample home-style food in Pune and offers signature dishes like *bharleli vangi* and *methi kaju*; the latter is rarely seen on restaurant menus, and is as fresh-tasting and unusual as Aniruddha had promised us it would be. Mathura is known for *gavran* Maharashtrian food rather than the Brahmin food we’ve been eating so far. “It’s difficult to define *gavran* food in any real way,” Aniruddha admits, “At its simplest, it’s food made the rustic way, with the few ingredients always available in the villages. A *gavran* meal would include a green vegetable, chilli *thecha*, *bhakri* and some sprouts. Pune Brahmin food is its more affluent cousin, with *koshimbirs*, *shrikhand* and *puris* also on the menu – on the taste front, almost a cross between Gujarati and *gavran* Maharashtrian food.” While *gavran* food can be rugged and often non-vegetarian,

Deepti Kasbekar, editor and compiler of the soon-to-be-published book *Karwar to Kolhapur via Mumbai*, explains that the delicacy of Puneri Brahmin food comes from the fact that the Puneri Brahmins were a community of number-crunchers, and wanted light, cooling, *satvik* dishes that would be conducive to working at math and intellectual pursuits. →



A TYPICAL PUNERI THALI

Most Puneri *thalis* are Brahmin and vegetarian, and typically consist of a fried snack, two or three vegetarian dishes, a *dal*, a *koshimbir*, *taak*, a green chutney, *chapattis*, *papad* and rice. At its simplest, dessert will be sugar stirred into your yoghurt; at its most luxurious, you get a choice of three desserts, at least one of them seasonal.

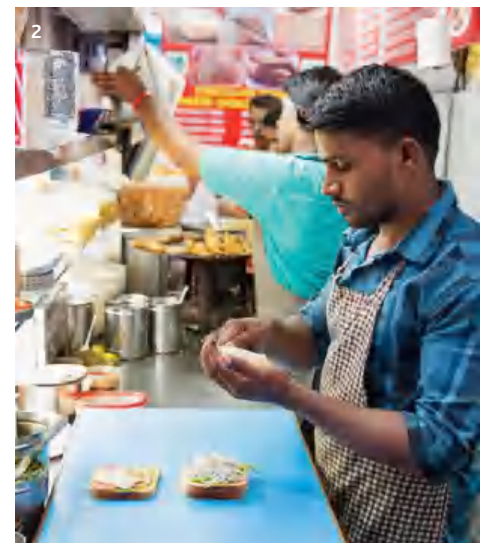
Besides New Poona Boarding House and Mathura, great places for Puneri *thalis* include **HOTEL SHREYAS**, a Pune institution. We’re here especially on a Sunday for the day’s special in the *thali*: *aluchi rassa bhaji*, a Maharashtrian potato specialty that it’s worth admitting you are a greedy glut for, and we can’t resist ordering the *puran poli* and the really moist *modaks* – after we’ve polished off our *thalis* (00-91-20-25532785; www.hotelshreyas.in; 1242 B, Apte Rd, Deccan Gymkhana; 11.30am – 3pm, 7.30pm – 10.30pm; *thali*: from ₹ 260 without sweet, from ₹ 325 with sweets, *puran poli*: ₹ 25, *modak*: ₹ 20).

DURVANKUR is another must-try. If you don’t waste food at this unlimited *thali* joint, you get a ₹ 30 discount on the ₹ 250 price. But the real hook is the food – traditional Maharashtrian classics done really well. Desserts include *dahi wada*, *shrikhand* and *aamras*. The *aamras* is seasonal (Mar – Jun); as you read this, you’re probably in time for the *sitaphal rabdi* that Durvankur is famous for (00-91-20-24474438; 1166, Tilak Rd, New Sadashiv Peth; 12pm – 3pm, 7pm – 11pm; *thali*: ₹ 250 [₹ 30 off if you don’t waste food]).

OTHER PUNE MUST-VISITS

Aniruddha also recommends the unassuming **SHREE UPAHAR GRUHA**. Mandar Shinde and Omkar Kasture have been coming here most Sundays for the last seven years. “For the *matki* in the *misal*,” they offer as explanation. It is undoubtedly one of the best *misals* we’ve tasted – delicate and light – and best washed down with the excellent *taak*. Shree Upahar Gruha is also known for its *sabudana khichdi* on Sundays (00-91-7709084848; 412, Amit Residency, Mandar Lodge Lane, Kaka Saheb Gadgil Marg, Shaniwar Peth, off Budhwar Peth; 7.30am – 11.30am, 3pm – 7pm; *misal*: ₹ 50, *taak*: ₹ 15).

Sneak in a detour to a place that puts a twist on the *dabeli*. **TAMANNA BHEL** is a *chaat* stall tucked away into the side of a building near Ruby Hall Clinic. It’s very popular for its *pani puri*, but Mahajit at the stall also turns out a mean cheese *dabeli* that adds another dimension to the Indian burger variant. Don’t diss it till you try it! (00-91-9822884437; Senior Citizen Office, Dhole Patil Rd; 1.30pm – 10pm; cheese *dabeli*: ₹ 20)



WHERE TO EAT

CHITALE BANDHU MITHAI WALE: 00-91-20-25671748; www.chitalebandhu.in; 759/ 54, Deccan Gymkhana; 8.30am – 1pm, 4pm – 8.30pm Tues – Sun; *bhakerwadi*: ₹ 240/ kg, *chirote*: ₹ 48/ 200g

NEW POONA BOARDING HOUSE: 00-91-20-24476289; 1149, Sadashiv Peth, opp Perugate Police Chowky; 11.30am – 3pm, 7.30pm – 10pm Sat – Thur; *thali*: ₹ 90 weekday, ₹ 140 Sun

BEDEKAR TEA STALL: 00-91-20-24451270; www.bedekarmisal.com; Munjabacha Bol, Narayan Peth; 7am – 7pm, 6am – 2pm Sun, closed Mon; Special Puneri Misal: ₹ 60

MATHURA: 00-91-20-25531975; 1262/ A, Prestige Chambers, Sai Service, JM Rd; 11am – 3.30pm; 7pm – 11.30pm; *kaju methi*: ₹ 150



Glossary for Pune

- *Bhakerwadi*: a traditional spicy-sweet fried snack
- *Bhakri*: round, flat, unleavened bread
- *Bharleli vangi*: stuffed brinjals
- *Barfi*: sweet confection in many variations
- *Chirote*: a fried flaky pastry, sometimes dipped in cardamom-flavoured sugar syrup
- *Dabeli*: *pao* stuffed with a potato mixture and garnished with pomegranate seeds
- *Gavran*: rustic-style
- *Koshimbir*: chopped salad, sometimes dressed with yoghurt, sometimes sweetened
- *Matki*: sprouted beans
- *Methi kaju*: fenugreek leaves with cashewnuts
- *Misal*: a layered snack of a sprouted bean gravy, topped with fried *farsan* and a spicier gravy, usually served with *pao*
- *Sample*: the base gravy for the *misal*
- *Shrikhand*: a hung yoghurt dessert
- *Taak*: buttermilk
- *Tari*: the spicy gravy for *misal*
- *Thali*: A meal made up of small quantities of different set dishes, served on a round platter (which is also called a *thali*)
- *Thecha*: chillies crushed with salt, garlic and cloves
- *Usal*: a gravy made with sprouted beans

'Regional, rustic food is the new gourmet revolution. The key lies in rediscovering the food we've always known, the food our grandmothers cooked for us'



Bhakerwadi (left) and chirote (right)
from Chitale Bandhu Mithai Wale

CLICK TO
VIEW ON
GOOGLE
MAPS

KOLHAPUR MUTTON MANIA

SUGARCANE fields line the highway from Pune to Kolhapur, the next course on our eating jag. The locals in Kolhapur characterise their food as *zhanzhanit* (tongue-tickling), Deepti Kasbekar tells us, rather than just spicy. Made well, it reflects a base of onion and garlic, ground into a damp-dry powder with dry coconut, a judicious use of spices and chilli powder and of the green chillies that grow abundantly in the region. The protein of choice is mutton – because Kolhapur prides itself on its tender goats. This is hearty fare – the city was a Maratha stronghold, and the warrior class wanted their food to fuel their aggression and keep them fighting fit in mind and body.

Straight off NH 4, we head to **Hotel Opal**, and we couldn't have chosen better – our apprehensions about Kolhapuri food are washed away at this elegantly-appointed restaurant. Specialties, the very patient wait staff will explain, include mutton fry, mutton *pandhra rassa* and mutton *tambda rassa*, *solkadi*, and the always-in-Kolhapur yoghurt-dressed onion slices. You eat the melt-in-your-mouth mutton fry with *chapattis*, you dip into the *tambda rassa* (redolent with spices, this mutton broth decoction looks more lethal than it is) with *bhakis*, or pour it over your rice. The *pandhra rassa*, coconut milk delicately flavoured with spiced mutton broth, is drunk through the meal



KARWAR TO KOLHAPUR VIA MUMBAI

Smita Deo's calls her soon-to-be-published book, *Karwar to Kolhapur Via Mumbai*, a "love-cook-story book." She pulls together the story of growing up in Karwar, being a newly-wed in Kolhapur and consolidating the marriage in Mumbai through memories and recipes. Along the way, we learn of her life – of marriage to Abhinay Deo, a then-struggling ad film maker (now a director known for *Delhi Belly*), of learning everything her mother-in-law had to teach her, of her desire to make her son love his mixed heritage through its food. The book, edited and compiled by Deepti Kasbekar, has recipes from Karwar, Kolhapur and Mumbai. "Maharashtrian food has always intrigued me with its wide variety in flavours and use of ingredients. Coming from Karnataka, where the staple diet is fish curry and rice, getting married into a family from Kolhapur where the diet consisted of *bhakri*, *muttonacha tambda rassa* and *pandhra rassa*, *methi chi bhaji* and a spicy dal was a big change for me. Going from mild, simple-flavoured food to traditionally *zhanzhanit* flavours has been a great journey."

Glossary for Kolhapur

Doodh: milk
Pandhra: white
Tambda: red
Rassa: thin gravy
Zhanzhanit:
tongue-tickling

and constantly replenished – the equivalent of Chinese tea at oriental restaurants. The *solkadi*, earthy, well-garnished with coriander leaves, is the best we will have on this trip.

There has been none of the wild heat we had anticipated having to soothe, but we are sticklers for sticking to our list of must-tries, so we take ourselves to **Solankis** by the bus stand and slug down a couple of its signature – and yummy – *doodh* cold drinks anyway. A new problem arises as the ice cream melts. The (open) secret to the richness of the milk cold drink lies in custard powder, very heavy on the stomach. It will take a walk around **Bhavani Mandap**, a historical building and compound within the once-walled part of Kolhapur, and down the periphery of **Rankala Lake** to get us even remotely ready to face dinner. The shore-side walk offers up a surprise. In the small area designated as a street-food hub, we come across an **All India Special Bhel** stall, complete with Raja Bhau's name emblazoned on it. Then another stall, and yet another. These are not happy-making surprises, because we had earlier looked for and, sadly, failed to find Raja Bhau, the original, at his three-stall spot in Kasbaug. He has shut shop for a family wedding. Everyone in Kolhapur was able to tell us this because Raja Bhau is a legend, doing so well with his spicy *bhel* that supposedly the income tax authorities know him well too. →



1



2



3



4

1. Mutton fry, *pandhra rassa* and *tambda rassa* at Hotel Opal
- 2 & 4. Chilling and chillies at Laxmipuri Market
- 3 & 6. Raw mangoes with chilli powder near Rankala Lake
5. Bring home a pair of local *chappals* from the street market



5



6

KOLHAPURI PANDHRA RASSA

Recipe courtesy Karwar to Kolhapur Via Mumbai



2 tbsp ghee
5 to 6 cloves (*lavang*)
5 to 6 cardamom (*elaichi*)
1 tsp caraway seeds (*shahjeera*)
1" stick cinnamon (*dalchini*)
1½ tbsp ginger paste
1½ garlic paste
1 kg mutton with *nalli* (marrow bones), chopped
5 tbsp yoghurt
Salt to taste
2 cups water + extra for grinding
1 dry coconut (brown skin removed), grated
1 fresh coconut, grated
1 tbsp poppy seeds (*khushkus*)
20 almonds
3 tbsp ghee
500 ml fresh coconut milk
5 to 6 red chillies, broken into two

1. Heat the 2tbsp ghee in a pressure cooker. Add the cloves, cardamom, caraway seeds, cinnamon, ginger paste, garlic paste and mutton. Sauté the mutton. Add the yoghurt and salt and sauté again for a few minutes.
2. Add the water and pressure cook for 15 minutes or till the mutton is cooked.
3. Grind both the types of grated coconut, poppy seeds and the almonds to a fine paste, using a little water.
4. Heat the 3 tbsp ghee in a pan, add the coconut paste and the coconut milk and bring to a boil, stirring continuously. Add the cooked mutton and bring again to a boil.
5. Serve hot, with brown rice, garnished with the red chillies.



Shyambhau's iconic
vada pao with special *chai*

Facing page: The statue of Rani
Tarabai rises out of Kayla Chowk

Bring to mind that food truck serving Cuban sandwiches in the movie *Chef*. Hungry diners waiting for the truck flaps to be lowered so they can get their daily fix. Make that a stationary blue truck so entrenched by the compound wall of Rajaram College that it takes you a while to work out that it is a truck at all. This spot, opposite the College of Agriculture, is where you will find **Shyam Vada Pao**, the domain of Shyamkumar Survanshi, who serves his famous *vada paos* from 10.30am. People turn up starting 10am: students arrive on two-wheelers, late office-goers in cars, moms even keep kids waiting in an auto. Shyam himself drops the flattened, coriander-flecked potato patties into piping hot oil. They fly off the front flap of the truck as soon as his helpers can serve them with thick slabs of bread; the wicked-looking green chillies on the counter can be added for an extra kick. Shyam tells us the secret of his success lies in the Indore potato he uses.

Committed to keeping the antacids industry in business, we rally on to a second late breakfast at **Phadtare Misal**. Served at simple long tables and benches in a shed, this *misal* is superlative. Three men from the family supervise and layer the *misal* (you can buy an extra plate of crunchy *farsan* to add to your mix) and there are people hovering over you to grab your place as soon as you finish.

More exercise is mandated – at **Laxmipuri Market** to see fruit and vegetable at its freshest, heaps of chillies in front of wholesale outlets, vendors cheerfully calling out to Krishna to photograph them. We stop to buy Kolhapuri jaggery in the shape of *modaks* (₹ 10 each). The area, store owner Sandeep Sadalge of Dhanvanti Traders tells us, is blessed with rich soil, both red and black, and well-watered by three rivers, which allows for the cultivation of the sugar that is the basis of Kolhapur's prosperous sugar industry (and the jaggery we're buying)

and the richness of the milk that makes those *doodh* cold drinks at Solankis what they are. We clutch our precious Kolhapuri jaggery, the very last of the season just ended (Oct – Mar), and move on to another famous must-buy – the Kolhapuri *chappal*.

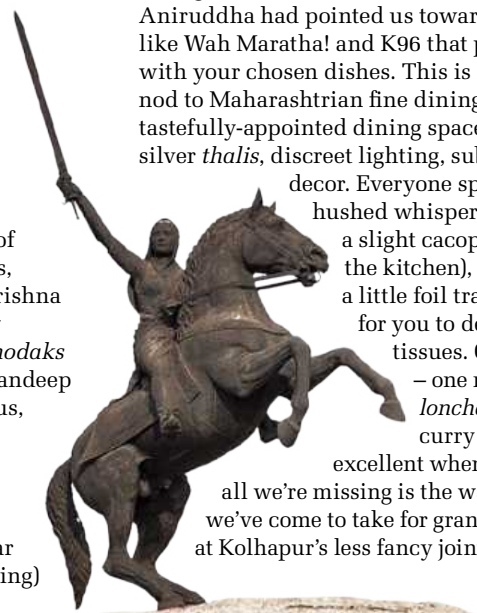
There's a whole street dedicated to these and so many variants, many with distinct Rajasthani influences. If you want the real thing, look for stitched, rather than glued, *chappals*; you can have them stained darker and even maroon; expect to pay anything up to ₹ 450; score the soles before wearing to prevent falls, and give them some time to soften when you first start wearing them.

Lunch, when we can face it, is at **Padma Guest House**. This venerable establishment has black and white photos framed in a display on the landing leading up to its first-floor location in a building near Padma Talkies. Padma is where we have our first taste of mutton *loncha*, a slightly tart, dry masala we love, but which the otherwise cooperative server cannot – or will not – tell us anything about.

The mutton *loncha* is wetter, but just as tasty at **Dehaati**, part of a new wave of eateries taking local food to the next level. In Pune, Aniruddha had pointed us towards eateries like Wah Maratha! and K96 that pair wines with your chosen dishes. This is Kolhapur's nod to Maharashtrian fine dining – a tastefully-appointed dining space, heavy silver *thalis*, discreet lighting, subtle wall

decor. Everyone speaks in hushed whispers (save for a slight cacophony from the kitchen), there's even a little foil tray placed for you to deposit your tissues. Our *thalis* – one mutton *loncha*, one egg curry – are excellent when they come;

all we're missing is the warmth we've come to take for granted at Kolhapur's less fancy joints. →



WHERE TO EAT

HOTEL OPAL: 00-91-231-2536767, 00-91-231-2537044; www.hotelopal.co.in; 2014-16A, E Ward, Old Pune-Bangalore Highway, opposite MAI Hyundai showroom (the restaurant is behind a new hotel under construction); 12pm – 3.45pm, 7.30pm – 10.45pm; mutton fry: ₹ 132/ plate, *pandhra/ tambda rassa*: ₹ 52/ small bowl

SOLANKIS: 00-91-231-2654567; Mahalaxmi Chambers, near ST Stand; 10.30am – 10.30pm; *doodh* cold drink with ice cream: ₹ 60, ₹ 50 without ice-cream

SHYAM VADA PAO: 00-91-9730401366; near

Rajaram College, opp College of Agriculture; 10.15am – 5.30pm; *vada*: ₹ 15, *vada pao*: ₹ 17, special *chai*: ₹ 8

PHADTARE MISAL: 1243/ 1, Shivaji Udyamnagar; Mon closed; *misal pao*: ₹ 40, extra *pao* (bread slice): ₹ 2, extra sev: ₹ 5

PADMA GUEST HOUSE: 00-91-231-6517336; www.padmakolhapur.com/padmaguest.htm; 1550, C Ward, behind Padma Talkies, Laxmipuri; 11am – 4pm, 7.15pm – 10.30pm; special mutton *loncha thali*: ₹ 340

DEHAATI: Ayodhya Park, Kavla Naka; 12.30pm – 3.30pm, 7.30pm – 10.30pm; mutton *loncha thali*: ₹ 300, egg curry *thali*: ₹ 220



1 & 6. Mrs Priya Samant turns out a Malvani feast in her traditional kitchen at Maachli
2 & 3. Fresh fish and produce at Mhapan Market
4. Kokum laid out to dry at Maachli
5. A fishing boat motor being carried out of the sea at Chivla Beach





MALVAN & VENGURLA A FANFARE OF FISH

AFTER the veggies and mutton, seafood awaits along the coastal belt. We start at **Atithi Bamboo Khaneval**, a huge shed with no pretensions – unless laminated tablecloths and plastic chairs are your idea of decor. The wait staff is brisk but helpful, pointing out that it makes more sense to order the *surmai thali* than the *surmai fry*, and that sharing works. Our *kolambi* and *surmai thalis* have the starring seafood in both fried and curry versions, a good *solkadi*, an additional gravy, lime wedges, *chapattis*, the ubiquitous onion slices and rice. The fish and prices change daily; what remains constant is how good the seafood is, succulent and delicately fried in a light coating of *rava* that takes nothing away from the freshness of the fish.

Chivla Beach, a bay of sheltered water, is a short walk away, and here you can watch the fishing boats coming in. Take a picnic and a blanket so you can sit under the gazebos on the beach and watch the sea.

Then, on to the main course. To **Maachli**, an unusual farmstay in Vengurla, across a bamboo bridge over a stream (see *Stay for more*). This is another world – of coconut trees and areca nut, of *kokum* hanging from branches and trampled underfoot, and, most importantly, of Mrs Priya Samant's table of plenty. This is coastal fare in Saraswat Brahmin style.

Coconut – grated, desiccated and as milk and water – is the star, alongside *kokum* and tamarind as souring agents. And if you're a non-vegetarian, you will have a wonderful choice of the cornucopia of the sea – not just fish, but also clams, mussels and crustaceans. Meals are served near the traditional kitchen, where a wood-fired cooking platform shares space with a modern gas range. Mrs Samant, once a Mumbai girl, left her job in nearby Kudal when the family set up this farmstay in 2012. The food is deceptively simple yet stoundingly complex in flavour and texture, a celebration of local ingredients and seasonings and, fittingly, is eaten off biodegradable plates made of dried betel nut branches.

Our first meal is a revelation – *rava*-fried *surmai* on a banana leaf, *solkadi* in a traditional *bharni*, *bhakis* from the fire, two *bhajis* featuring the Maharashtrian favourites, *usal* and *vaal*, rice, and a dessert of *aamras*, delicately infused with *elaichi* to render it even more exquisite. Later meals are but worthy competitors, and finally, we ask to watch her cook in her aromatic kitchen. With the

deftness of practice, she makes a *tisrya masala*, a Malvani clam dish (see recipe – right), a showcase of the seafood, coconut, tamarind and chillies that make the food of the region the rock star that it is. →

*Glossary
in Malvan &
Vengurla*
Bharni: pickling jar,
Kolambi: prawn,
Rava: semolina, *Surmai*: kingfish
Tisrya: clams
Vaal: local butter beans



TISRYA MASALA

Recipe courtesy Mrs Priya Samant, Maachli

500g clams
Salt to taste
10ml lemon juice
½ cup warm water
100g grated coconut
50ml oil
2 medium onions, finely chopped
30g ginger-garlic paste
1½ cup water
¼ tsp turmeric powder
10ml tamarind pulp
Chopped coriander leaves for garnish

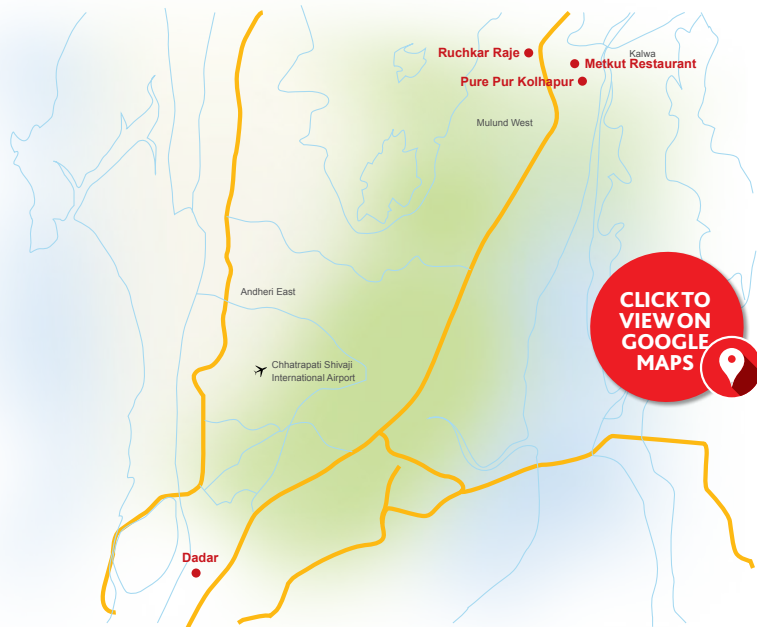
For the *masala*:

20ml oil
2 medium onions, sliced
4 to 5 cloves
7 to 8 peppercorns
2 sticks cinnamon
½ tsp cumin seeds
1 tsp coriander seeds
4 to 5 dry red chillies
50g desiccated dry coconut (*kopra*)
¼ cup water

1. Clean and wash the clams. Apply salt and lemon juice to them and set aside for 30 minutes.
2. To prepare the *masala*, heat 20ml oil in a *kadai* (wok) and sauté the sliced onions till golden brown.
3. In a separate pan, dry roast the cloves, peppercorns, cinnamon, cumin seeds, coriander seeds, dry red chillies and the dry grated coconut till light brown. Mix the roasted spices into the browned onions and, adding one-fourth cup water, grind to a very fine paste. Set aside.
4. Mix the warm water into the grated coconut, grind and squeeze out to obtain a thick coconut milk. Set aside.
5. Heat 50ml oil in a vessel. Add the finely-chopped onion and sauté till golden brown. Add the ginger-garlic paste and sauté till the raw smell disappears. Add the ground *masala* and sauté on low heat for two to three minutes. Add water and bring to a boil. Add the marinated clams, turmeric powder, prepared coconut milk and tamarind pulp, and cook for seven to eight minutes. Adjust the seasoning.
7. Serve hot, garnished with the chopped coriander.

WHERE TO EAT

Atithi Bamboo Khaneval: Chivla Beach Rd;
11am – 3.30pm; prices vary with catch and season,
thalis from ₹ 300, fish plates from ₹ 80



MUMBAI MAHARASHTRA ON A PLATE

AT **Metkut** in Thane, which Kiran Bhide runs with Chef Sunny Pawaskar, the dishes on the menu are drawn from food all over Maharashtra. Bhide comes from a background of cardiac care management. Chef Sunny is an alumnus of IHM Guwahati, with a strong affinity for continental food. Both wanted to elevate Maharashtrian food to showcase the rich culinary heritage that is otherwise seen only in home kitchens. They went out eating together, they invited themselves into aunties' kitchens; they worked to expand their culinary palate from beyond their mothers' Konkani repertoire to include dishes from all across the state. "People were so encouraging of our experiments, forgiving of our adaptations," Chef Sunny says.

In turn, both Bhide and Pawaskar have made Metkut an almost collaborative effort with their diners. The six-month-old restaurant now remains open on Monday to meet its regulars' request for fasting foods, each suggestion is carefully considered and often implemented, and the charming Bhide disarms each lady who visits by

assuring her that the food here will not be as good as her own

cooking, but that he would welcome her suggestions for improvement.

We ask for and receive suggestions for food from the Vidarbha region. The *mutter* patties make an interesting starter, while the *vangya che bharit* is a delicately different version of a more robust *baingan bhartha*. Our Nagpuri *goli bhat*, spiced rice served with gram flour dumplings, comes with a typical-to-the-region trio of *tadka*, *hing* solution and tamarind curry on the side to be added at your discretion. We end with a *puran poli* to trump most of the *puran polis* we've recently eaten – dripping with ghee. Each of these is both familiar and subtly different from dishes we've tasted on our journey – and, while, like Chef Sunny, we are otherwise "pure non-veg," we do not notice the absence of meat on the menu.

We're also all veg on the food trail we do with **Amit Pamnani**, ex-chef with our erstwhile sister magazine *BBC GoodFood India*. Now with a dairy major, Amit hosts French dinners, inspired by the menus of his mentor, the legendary Chef Raymond Blanc, and, importantly for us, a tasting tour through always-crowded Dadar (*see next page for details*). We set off on foot, sampling at places where you only stand and eat – iconic *vada paos*, drinks not exactly Maharashtrian but yummy nevertheless, great places to buy local ingredients and ready foods. The two-hour tour is peppered with Amit's culinary wisdom and asides about this predominantly Maharashtrian area, one of the

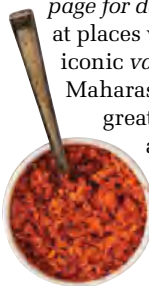
last in Mumbai. A lot of Maharashtrian joints in Mumbai, he tells us, are about "small plates" – snacks like *sabudana vadas*, *thalipeeth*, and *kothimbir vadi*; and most locals tend to frequent these because each is known for something that is usually time-consuming to make at home, and always good value for money. The iconic **Prakash**, for instance, he points out, turns out the most consistent *sabudana khichdi* and *sabudana vadas* you can expect, both of which often stymies home cooks because *sabudana* is a notoriously difficult ingredient to get right; the queue outside the eatery for fasting foods on special days like *Ekadashi* is longer than the line to get a table inside.

Our tour ends at the now-cannot-be-missed **Aaswaad**, where we must wait almost a half-hour because the restaurant's *misal pao* has just won the title of World's Tastiest Vegetarian Dish at the global Foodie Hub Awards. Once inside, we settle down to excellent *thalipeeth* with white butter, great *kothimbir vadi* – and the award-winning *misal pao*. What can we say? It was good, but no better, no less than all the other *misal paos* we had eaten across Maharashtra. That says something for Maharashtrian food, no? →

Glossary for Mumbai

Bhat: rice

Kothimbir vadi: a steamed/ fried starter made of chickpea flour and coriander leaves
Mutter patties: spiced green-pea-stuffed potato patties crisp fried



WHERE TO EAT

METKUT: 00-91-22-65110010; Zala Sapphire, opp Ghantali Devi Mandir, Naupada, Thane West; 10am – 11pm, from 8am Sat – Sun Wed closed, *mutter patties*: ₹ 50, *vangya che bharit*: ₹ 110, *puran poli*: ₹ 75



1



2



3

1. The Metkut *puran poli* is paradise on a plate
- 2 & 6. An iconic *lassi* joint figures on Amit's food trail through Dadar
- 3 & 5. Amit will also point out the non-dining landmarks on the trail
5. The *mutter* patties at Metkut brings to mind the spicier fare of Vidarbha

Facing page:

Top: *Vadas* on the food trail through Dadar
Bottom: *Thecha* and *lasoon* chutney at Metkut



4



6

Kothimbir vadi at Aaswaad
in Dadar, Mumbai

Amit Pamnani's Maharashtrian Food Trail

Amit Pamnani, who has been a professional chef, a food editor and columnist, now takes you on **Authentic Maharashtra Snack Trails** in the Dadar area of Mumbai. Born and brought up here, he knows every nook and corner of the area. He will take you to iconic old eateries, authentic shops where you can buy homemade, hand-ground masalas, snacks and cooking equipment for your next authentic Maharashtra meal (Amit Pamnani's Authentic Maharashtra Snack Trail through Dadar: amitpamnani@yahoo.co.uk; around two to two-and-a-half hours; trails start at ₹ 500).

As you read this, I'm probably in hiding. In retrospect, travelling just to eat is an adventure fraught with uncertainty. At each place, there were decisions to be made. At what point in the proceedings do you show your hand? What will they think of your attempts to pen a few notes mid-bite? How would the emergence of the professional camera – not the ubiquitous mobile phone – affect the food put in front of you? As it panned out, we need not have worried. We were eating at places so iconic, so beloved of the locals, that it mattered not a jot to them that we wanted to write about them or photograph the food. The question of the chef doing something special for us did not arise – he knew he didn't need to. And we were largely able to pay all our bills, so no compromises there either.

But writing about what we chose to eat? *That*, we realised, was a far more dangerous game. Why, someone belligerently asked, did you not try the *bhel* from the sixth stall under the third banyan tree down that street? Relax, I say to you – and to myself. This exploration was meant to be just a sampling of some of the best known establishments in each destination. You, dear reader, probably have other joints you choose to eat at, places that you believe better fit the bill. We'd love to hear about them, that's why we have email and social media.

In the meanwhile, I'm probably in hiding, but I have my stash of *bhakerwadi* and *puran poli* to sustain me while I await everyone's return to sanity. ☺

Make it Happen

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Just after the rains is lovely and bright green, although winter is ideal (Nov – Feb), ranging from pleasant to biting cold, depending on where you are in the state, and also about the only time Mumbai is a little cool. And, of course, there'll be plenty of seafood.

GETTING THERE

Mumbai's a good place to start; Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport is well connected, and, if you finish off in Malvan, fly out of Goa's Dabolim International Airport.

GETTING AROUND

If you're road tripping across the state like we did, it's best to have your own wheels. We used and liked the services of Anfa Travels (00-91-9821352189 [Laeeq]; ₹ 2,800/day for an AC Indigo).

STAY

PUNE: Conveniently located on the road going into Pune from the Bombay-Pune Expressway, **E SQUARE HOTEL** is sited in the mall of the same name, which makes it easy to spot from afar. Choose from well-appointed rooms in themes like Scandinavian and English Country; the breakfast is good (00-91-66044100, 00-91-9370808800; www.esquarehotel.com, sales.pune@e-squareindia.com; Level 5, 132A, University Rd; from ₹ 4,500 with breakfast).

KOLHAPUR: A comfortable business hotel, **Hotel K Tree** is conveniently located close to Kavla Naka, Hotel Opal and Dehaati (00-91-231-2526990, 00-91-231-2527990; www.hotelktree.com, info@hotelktree.com; 65 E, Shivaji Park; from ₹ 3,500 with breakfast).

MALVAN & VENGURLA: Stay and eat at **Maachli** (00-91-963733284 [Prathamesh Samant], 00-91-9423879865 [Pravin Samant]; www.maachli.in; Ishavasyam, Major State Highway 4, Manjardewadi, Parule Village, Vengurla, Sindhudurg District; ₹ 5,400 with all meals).

MUMBAI: Try the centrally-located **Le Sutra** (00-91-22-66420025; www.lesutra.in, info@lesutra.in; 14, Union Park, Khar [West]; from ₹ 7,000 with breakfast).

OTHER WAYS TO ACCESS MAHARASHTRIAN FOOD FROM MUMBAI RESTAURANTS



Courtesy Asha Karandikar, Assistant Marketing Administration Manager, Lonely Planet Magazine India

Purepur Kolhapur: This one serves authentic Kolhapuri cuisine – hot and spicy. Try the chicken *dhangari thali*. The *pandhra* and *tambda rassas* are unlimited (00-91-22-25330402; Ram Janaki CHS, near Ghantali Mandir, Ghantali Rd, Naupada, Thane West; 11am – 3.30pm, 7pm – 11.30pm Tues – Sun; chicken *dhangari thali*: ₹ 300).

Ruchkar Raje: Each dish from this takeaway

kitchen is prepared in authentic CKP style. You can order a meal for four at under ₹ 1,000 and the kitchen is really hygienic. The specialty is fish! (00-91-9819262981; A/3, Crescent CHS, Panch Pakhadi, Thane West; thalis from ₹ 170)

Panshikar: The origins of the name of this eatery can be traced to Panshi, a small village on the Goa-Maharashtra border. This eatery is great for fasting foods like *sabudana vada*, *batata puri*, peanut *usal*, *pattice* and *farali* (fasting) *misal* (00-91-22-23861211; Gordhandas Bldg, Jagannath

Shankar Sheth Rd, near Portuguese Church, Girgaum; 9am – 9pm; from ₹ 45).

Potoba, Mahim: This no-frills eatery will bring your grandmother to mind – if she served home-style *tandalachi bhakri*, *vanghyachi bhaji* with *jowarichi bhakri*, traditional *metkut tup bhat* and *shrikhand poli*, that is (Shop No 3 & 4, Amin Manzil, Kakad Industrial, LJ Rd, Mahim West; 8am – 11pm; dishes from ₹ 85).

Mi Marathi: The food here excuses the ambience. Try the *misal pao* and *sabudana wada* for breakfast, and the *jawarichi bhakri*,

thecha, *vangyache bharit aani zunka* for lunch (00-91-22-26134636; 5, Alfa Apartment, Shree Parleshwar Rd, Vile Parle East; 8.30am – 10pm Thur – Tues; *misal pao*: ₹ 60).

Sindhudurg, Dadar: One of Mumbai's first Malvani restaurants, this is a great value-for-money option. Specialties include shellfish and crab masala, *kombdi vade* and green Bombay duck curry (00-91-22-24301610; Sita Building, RK Vaidya Rd, near Shivaji Park Police Station, Dadar West; seafood as per catch, from ₹ 150)

THE SEASONS. THE TIDES. YOUR BODY CLOCK. YOU MAKE THE CONNECTION.

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MAGAZINE
INDIA

Girls shooting the breeze
on the Henderson
Wave bridge

Facing page:

1. Explore how sensory
experiences situate
us in the world in which
we live at the Singapore
Art Museum
2. Fancy cocktails
at the Fullerton Bay Hotel
3. Out on the town
in Clark Quay





CLICK ON THE
LINKS TO FIND
OUT MORE!



LADIES

DAYS OUT

Safe to travel across and with a great mix of activities available – from bargain shopping and culture to unusual bars (and spas) and more – planning a girls-only trip in Singapore is easy as pie

WORDS SONIA NAZARETH | PHOTOGRAPHS JYOTHY KARAT

WHEN was the last time you travelled solo or took time out of your crazy schedule for just you and the girlfriends? As a frequent single woman traveller, I've felt intimidated in some parts of the world, but Singapore has found a place among the exceptions. It's just one of those pan-national places that speaks everyone's language. This is a truly live-and-let-live society of innately well-mannered people. On each successive journey here, I've always been struck by how exhilarating it feels to go out for a good time with no fear of being with 'just girls', whether on a night walk or a neighbourhood exploration, and to feel as comfortable as I would in my living room. It's a feeling to me that's more important than what's on sale and the latest places at which to eat. It is with this mindfulness and gratitude that Jyothy and I hit the town.→



EXPLORE A NEIGHBOURHOOD

Shop & graze in Tiong Bahru

If perfumes could be made of the air in this charming, hipster neighbourhood, I'd buy them by the crate. Tiong Bahru reeks of the alluring and decadent aroma of fresh-brewed coffee and pastry – the area is home to some of the coolest coffee shops and hottest boutiques in town. We follow our noses into **Tiong Bahru Bakery** in pursuit of its delectable breads, berry tarts, a *croque monsieur* – the Parisian café cliché – and a cup of steaming cappuccino (00-65-6220-3430; www.tiongbahrubakery.com; 56, Eng Hoon St; 8am – 8pm Sun – Thur, 8am – 10pm Fri – Sat; pastries from ₹ 240).

Next door, **The Orange Thimble** café reflects the diversity of the neighbourhood. Young, old, straight and gay customers sit together in harmonious bliss, admiring the art for sale on the walls, beaming at glass cases that brim over with rainbow cakes and chocolates that sparkle like jewels. The meals here – think wholesome shepherd's pie – are nothing short of mama's comforting supper (00-65-6223-8068; 56, Eng Hoon St, 01-68; 9am – 11pm; mains from ₹ 430).

Satiated from all that snacking, we head to **Nana and Bird**, a store that establishes the quirky personality that's a common denominator to all the stores around here. They only curate what they themselves truly love. The focus is as much on the clothing and accessories on sale, as the stories behind their creation (00-91-65-9117-0430; www.nanaandbird.com; 59, Eng Hoon St; 12pm – 7pm Tues – Fri, 11am – 7pm Sat – Sun, clothes from ₹ 5,760, accessories from ₹ 1,500).

A five-minute walk away, **Strangelets** is an ode to the whimsical. We find

1. Lolla encourages community dining at its communal table
2. A slice of rainbow cake speaks of inclusivity at the Orange Thimble café
3. Eclectic garments on sale in Kampong Glam



adorable finger puppets, temporary tattoos, soaps named after gardeners, all permutations and combinations of earthenware, wallets made of paper – all born of what the store describes as “militant craftsmanship” that stands firm against the mass-produced (00-65-6222-1456; www.strangelets.sg, hello@strangelets.sg; 7, Yong Siak St; 11am – 8pm Mon – Fri, 10am – 8pm Sat – Sun; bits and bobs from ₹ 300).

A few footsteps beyond, **Books Actually** curates too – but books, rather than objects. Besides its vast range of titles on Singapore, it champions local, fresh writers publishing their work under the store's imprint – Math Paper Press. In its backroom, we end up losing ourselves in the vintage bric-a-brac on sale. The excitement generated by black-and-white photographs and unusual stationery, invites a joy associated, for many, with childhood when new discoveries were regularly made (00-65-6222-9195; www.booksactually.com; 9, Yong Siak St; 11am – 9pm Tues – Sat; 11am – 6pm Sun – Mon; books from ₹ 300, knick-knacks from ₹ 200).

But all retail therapy in Tiong Bahru is punctuated by visits to its whimsical cafés. **PS Café Petit** has plush interiors, mirrored walls, white tablecloths and the kind of chairs that make you want to linger. The fast food – pizza, hamburgers and salads – is all created with a slow-food sensibility and an emphasis on ingredients, quality and seasonality. It's an apt way to recharge before continuing an exploration of this neighbourhood (00-65-9226-7088; www.pscafe.com; No 41, Block 78, Guan Chuan St; 11am – 11pm, last food orders at 10.30pm; pizzas from ₹ 1,050).

Kampong Glam and Haji Lane

Heady with atmosphere, Kampong Glam is part of the holy trinity of Singapore's must-visit historic districts (the other two being Little India and Chinatown). A tapestry of traditional trades, shophouses and quirky stores makes

this area a popular draw. **Bussorah Street**, with its evenly-spaced coconut trees, revamped shophouses that sell everything from fabrics and food to books, is as popular as the big gold-domed **Sultan Mosque** that looms large. We're having a good time exploring the boutique stores, oohing and aahing over the graffiti and cool cafés on **Haji Lane**, Singapore's narrowest street, when Danny, our guide, begins to prod us gently on. Turns out our Indonesian Minangkabau lunch at **Rumah Makan Minang** won't wait if we dawdle. We queue for 15 minutes to pay for our *nasi padang* (steamed rice served with several pre-cooked dishes), but patience is a virtue, especially in places where the locals vote with their feet. Unashamedly spicy and bursting with flavour, an assortment of meats, fish, vegetables and *sambals* (sauces made from a range of chilli peppers) arrive. Mix all the accompaniments together with the steaming white rice on your plate and, just like the multi-cultural city of Singapore, the whole, is greater than the sum of its diverse parts. Expect to leave here a little heavier than when you arrived (00-65-6294-4805; www.minang.sg; 18 & 18A, Kandahar St, next to Sultan Mosque; 7am – 8pm Mon – Fri, 7am – 5pm Sat – Sun; from ₹ 150).

Chinatown

It's always pleasant to wander through this area, with its red lanterns that beckon you forward and charming stores brimming over with Made-in-China goods that pull you in. Top the experience with dinner at the **Tiong Shian Porridge Centre**. You order your own fare at the counter; there are the delicious, if conventional, chilli fried prawns, but, for the gastronomically curious, there's also frog porridge that the locals adore. The frog, on the bone, is succulent and tender, the porridge rich and full. Add a little soy sauce if you want yours less bland. One more time that jumping off the safe boat pays off handsomely in culinary terms! (00-65-6222-3911; 265, New Bridge Rd; 9am – 2.30pm, 4pm – 12am Mon – Fri, 9am – 12am Sat – Sun; mains from ₹ 330)

SPA GAZING

Blow + Bar

My hands are held softly for a manicure. A glass of wine arrives. Light fills the room – through large windows that let the sun in. But the reason Blow + Bar works so well is that it anticipates the needs of a multi-tasking urban girl. Here, you can combine an afternoon with the girlfriends, giggling over a glass of complimentary wine or beer, while you get your nails manicured or your hair treated to its ultimate blowout. For those who came in late, this signature hair-intensive spa treatment involves a double cleansing, a scalp massage, a hot towel mask and a choice from five signature blowout looks (00-65-6438-7005; www.blowplusbar.com; One, Raffles Place Shopping Podium; check website for timings; blowouts from ₹ 1,800, manicure: ₹ 1,300).

So Spa

With the proliferation of spas, especially in this part of the world, it's maintaining a competitive edge that keeps a spa ahead of its peers. And So Spa, with its spa gardens and mud-and-float pool and cascading waterfall, has an edge. For the privacy-addict, there's a ladies-only area within the spa garden. The signature treatment I avail of ends up being a blend of Eastern and Western techniques. →



1. It is always pleasant to stroll through Chinatown with its red lanterns and cheap and cheerful Made-in-China goods



2. Painting the town red at Ku De Ta, one of the many great bars in the city
3. Nailing a manicure at Blow + Bar
4. The Kampong Glam area is bright and inviting





What's not unusual, but just as pleasing, is the spa's enthusiasm to customise your experience. I choose from a range of essential oils, pillows, post-treatment teas – provided by knowledgeable therapists. For those who want to elevate their experience, a socialising patio and a deep relaxation room can be availed of. Happiness lies in the details (00-65-6708-8358; www.singaporeresortsentosa.com; 2, Bukit Manis Rd, Sentosa; check website for timings; one-hour Sentosa Massage: ₹ 8,500).

COOL TABLES, HOT MEALS

Lolla

Ann Siang Road, the street on which the restaurant Lolla lives, is a charming area to explore on foot. Home to elegantly-restored shophouses and a lively café and bar scene, there's always something afoot. Post 7pm on weekends, this hip area turns into a rambunctious, energetic, anyone's-welcome 24-hour party-people scene. And Lolla fits perfectly in. It's always pulsing. We grab (quite literally) seats at the open-seat bar counter to watch the action unfold, but you could alternatively opt for the more sedate and regal communal dining room in the basement.

In an age driven by individuality, the restaurant is an antidote and encourages community, not just in the seating arrangements, but also in the portions. These are small, but the establishment encourages you to order several and share. The ingredients celebrate the seasonal, and the braised beef tripe and lamb cutlets have us in raptures. Our biggest error is ordering a small portion of the delectable sea urchin pudding (which goes down as smooth as custard), instead of a large one. Still, we now have enough energy to join the revellers

1. Live musicians add punch to the Sunday brunch at Town Restaurant at the Fullerton Hotel

2 & 3. The beef tripe and lamb cutlets at Lolla, where the emphasis is on the fresh and seasonal

Facing page: Delectable dessert canapés at the Sunday brunch at the Fullerton Bay Hotel



dancing down the street (00-65-6423-1228; www.lolla.com.sg; 22, Ann Siang Rd; check website for timings; beef tripe: ₹ 1,100).

Cocotte

To get to Cocotte, you have to pass through the eclectic lobby of the **Wanderlust Hotel**, which, with its industrial design and unusual bric-a-brac on sale, is an experience in itself. The whacky atmosphere is made even more enticing by the fact that Cocotte offers unpretentiously large servings in a bright, creatively-decorated dining hall. Perfect for lunch or dinner, which you're better off approaching famished and dreaming, for instance, of a delicate roasted sea bass, served with basil aioli, tomato coulis and a salad of quinoa, capers, mint... Expect to leave with a lighter wallet and heavier tummy (00-65-6298-1188; www.restaurantcocotte.com; 2, Dickson Rd; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 1,600).

Sunday Champagne brunch at Town Restaurant, Fullerton Bay Hotel

Even if this iconic hotel didn't do the mother of all brunches (and they do), it would be worth visiting for the history it's steeped in. The building, which used to be the general post office, with its Neo-Classical features and fluted Doric colonnades, has its guests running out of superlatives. A fitting setting for our Sunday Champagne brunch really, because the meal is so hearty, so generous, it feels as if it's come from a time long ago – when rich food and overflowing tables were a sign of the prosperous.

Before me are endless tables of everything local and languid – patronised by Singapore's elite and expats. *Char kway tiau* (stir-fried rice cake strips), *beef hor fun* (beef fillet cooked in oyster and soy sauce), *mee hong kong* (pan-fried yellow noodles with chicken and prawns), *laksa* (spicy noodle soup), Hainanese chicken rice, braised duck, barbecued pork, big and small oysters. You may find

a variation of some of these delights at hawkers' centres, but they're served here with refined ingredients and much plate poetry. In the background, a guitar player and his crooner take requests, serenading us through our repast with panache. The Champagne flows too, if that's what you've signed up for, lubricating conversation and acting as the punctuation marks between bites: Malay, Indian, Peranakan... all the cultures that make Singapore the accommodating, complex world it is (00-65-6877-8128; www.fullertonhotel.com; 1, Fullerton Square, 12pm – 3.30pm; book at least a week in advance if you want a seat by the windows overlooking the river; buffet from ₹ 7,250 with free-flowing Champagne, from ₹ 5,050 without alcohol).

Bacchanalia

Located in the historic Masonic Hall, Bacchanalia feels like the set for a period movie. Dark wood panelling, plush seating and an amber glow are backdrop to the food theatre about to unfold. Friendly, flirtatious waiters serve us small but delicious portions of the eclectic. Think *foie gras* satay – done with lemongrass, tamarind jam, grated chestnuts

and peanut satay sauce, or the Soused Iwashi, which is lightly-pickled Japanese sardines served with sweet-corn tempura, a charred spring-onion purée and cauliflower gratin. Just how experimental can you get with cauliflower gratin, we wonder. Think deep-fried cauliflower florets with a white truffle and cheese foam that bubbles frothily in our mouths. Underlying all that's delicious is the idea that fine dining can be fun and we're encouraged to order a few portions and share. If you show a little interest, someone on the staff will take you around the herb garden, explaining what goes into your food, and enabling an interaction with the head chef if that's on your wish list, or taking you for a look around the kitchen. When we visit the kitchen, a couple's seated cosily there, having a special dinner on pre-booked request. It's hard not to leave Bacchanalia with a more-than-full belly, and with a little more knowledge of and gratitude for the food that we eat (00-65-091-453; www.bacchanalia.asia; 23, A Coleman St; 12pm – 3pm Mon – Fri, also 6pm – 12am Mon – Thur, 6pm – 2am Fri – Sat; mains from ₹ 900). →





SHOPPERS' STOP

Orchard Road

Mention Orchard Road and you'll hear the oft-repeated joke – a road that used to be lined with plantations now sprouts malls. A few trees, remnants of times past, punctuate the journey between temples of consumerism. If you like to shop calmly, the morning hours, until 12pm, are the quietest. If you're short on time and want to find local designers, one-off pieces, curated selections and well-crafted objects for home and hearth, **Keepers – Singapore Designer Collective** is your one-stop shop (00-65-8299-7109; www.keepers.com.sg; Orchard Green, junction of Cairnhill Rd and Orchard Rd; 11am – 10pm; from ₹ 700). Other fashion-forward, indie brands can be found in abundance in **Orchard Central** (00-65-6238-1051; www.orchardcentral.com.sg; 181, Orchard Rd; 11am – 10pm). A special highlight here is **The Editor's Market** that appeals to a young, hip new Singaporean who's shed her clean-cut image, and wants to invest in clothes and accessories that will turn a few heads, but which are comfortable enough to integrate into her wardrobe (www.theeditorsmarket.com; clothes from ₹ 900).

CULTURE CULTURE

The Singapore Art Museum

We're lost for words to describe our time here. The exhibitions are always changing, but what they all do – and do well – push the lines of the world as we know it. Interactivity is a big part of the experience. On my nose, I have a pair of glasses that distort spatial distances, and am then asked to navigate a maze, feeling like a blind rat in a dark cave, hands stretched out before me. Over the next few hours, I touch objects

1. The Singapore Art Museum is a feast for the senses

2. Keepers: Singapore Designer Collective is your one-stop shop for local design

with eyes shut and sniff unnamed fragrances in vials to see how our senses reflect the world around us.

Once you've seen the art on offer, head to the **Supermama Store**. On sale are limited editions of funky knick-knacks handpicked from around the world – from piggy banks to tote bags, whacky cards to cup-and-saucer sets (00-65-6589-9580; www.singaporeartmuseum.sg; 71, Bras Basah Rd; 10am – 7pm (last entry 6.15pm), till 9pm Fri; check website to see what's on and for the schedule of the free 45-min guided tours; ₹ 480 adult, ₹ 240 child and senior citizen [photo ID required], free entry 6pm – 9pm Fri; Supermama Store: www.supermama.sg; 11am – 8pm; from ₹ 250).

Gillman Barracks

The Gillman Barracks is located at the site of a former military camp, now converted into a cluster of art galleries. A wander through the public museums, commercial galleries and non-profit spaces is an ode to the city's contemporary arts scene. With a large Asian representation and a few international names, the galleries are small and intimate, and it's easy to feel the energy behind the displays, especially when you have a chance to chat with the curator and the artist (www.gillmanbarracks.com; 9, Lock Rd; check individual gallery pages on the website for opening hours; closed Mon; free).

SPORTING GIRL

Forest Adventure

We're eager for some urban unwind. Forest Adventures – with its wobbly ladders, tricky crossings, funny walkways, Tarzan swings and ziplines – is a great way of getting to know the trees better and of bonding with the girlfriends



while testing your own limits. You sit on a tree platform and debate if you're brave enough. You quiver. You quake. But once you jump off the platform's edge on the Tarzan Swing or zipline over a water body, you realise that letting go is the best thing that could happen to you. Also empowering is the trained instructor who equips you with a harness and helmet and delivers a 30-minute safety briefing, but lets you take control once you begin, leaving you in charge of your security and pace (00-65-8100-7421; www.forestadventure.com.sg; 825, Bedok Reservoir Rd; 9.30am – 6.30pm Tues – Sun; ₹ 2,150 adult, ₹ 2,010 child under 18).

FANCY NANCY: NIGHTS ON THE TOWN

Loof

This rooftop bar, with its secluded alcoves, cool crowd, not-too-loud music, and Southeast-Asian-inspired cocktails, states that there's always room at the top, and it's true. The dress code is as casual as the vibe is easy – come in your pajamas or in your best gown and you'll feel just as welcome. The drinks are unusual, too – my To Thai For vodka comes infused with lime, lemongrass, chilli, coconut rum and lemonade (00-65-9773-9304; www.loof.com.sg; 331, North Bridge Rd, Odeon Towers Extension Rooftop, opp Raffles Hotel Shopping Arcade; 5pm – 1am Mon – Thurs, till 3am Fri – Sat; drinks from ₹ 800).

CÉ LA VI

Once we're in CÉ LA VI, atop the looming architectural icon that is Marina Bay Sands, we begin to wonder what we came here for – the view or the drinks? The former is clearly more affordable than the latter, but the drinks are worth it,

1. A 24-hour party is unleashed on Ann Siang Road post 7pm every weekend

2. Jump out of your comfort zone on a zipline at Forest Adventure

3. The To Thai For – vodka infused with lime, lemongrass, chilli, coconut rum and lemonade at the rooftop Loof bar

and this is easily one of the best places from which to watch the lights come on around the city by evening. The soundtrack to my Lady Marmalade – a blend of gin, Cointreau, lemon juice and blackberry marmalade – is the pulsing music of the resident DJ and the air-kissing of Singapore's party crowd (00-65-6688-7688; www.marina.baysands.com; L57-01, North SkyPark at Marina Bay Sands, Tower 3; check website for timings; drinks from ₹ 1,250).

Potato Head Folk

If every club were as vibrant and creative as Potato Head Folk, with wall murals and quirky sculptures that liberally dot its four floors (including the rooftop), the world would be a more joyful place. Leading us off the straight-and-narrow are items on the menu like beetroot and horseradish pickled quail eggs, and a sticky toffee pudding with toasted coconut, butterscotch and clotted cream. These treats, best accompanied by drinks created in-house with names like Heard It Through The Grapevine, make us feel like we're in several of the magic lands atop Enid Blyton's *The Magic Faraway Tree* (00-65-6327-1939; www.pttheadfolk.com; 36, Keong Saik Rd; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 900).

Catalunya

Glass-domed Catalunya, looking out over the waters of Marina Bay and offering contemporary Spanish cuisine, is but one example of the city's dynamic nature.

Mixologists create imaginative cocktails: try drinks that represent Barcelona and you'll taste what Singapore does best – embrace cultures and make them her own (00-65-6534-0188; www.catalunya.sg; The Fullerton Pavilion; 82, Collyer Quay; check website for timings; cocktails from ₹ 800). ¹¹



Make it Happen: Singapore for Women

Essentials

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Singapore enjoys roughly the same warm, tropical temperature through the year, so anytime is a good time to visit. Prices tend to rise during events like the Singapore Grand Prix in September.

GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, IndiGo, Malaysia Airlines, Sri Lankan Airlines, Air India and Jet Airways fly to Singapore from Mumbai and New Delhi, and you'll get better fares if you book in advance (*return fares start at ₹ 20,170*).

GETTING AROUND

A convenient ez-link card offers visitors unlimited travel on basic buses, MRT and LRT trains (www.ezlink.com.sg). Each card comes with a rental deposit of ₹ 480, refundable as long as the card is returned within five days. The one-day pass begins at ₹ 480 (*excluding the price of the deposit*). As Singapore has such excellent public transport, it makes sense to have this handy. But, when you're in the centre, a taxi for the short distances is preferable. If you want to calculate an approximate fare before you travel, visit www.taxisingapore.com. Taxi fares start from ₹ 145.

VISA

A tourist visa for Singapore takes one working day to process (www.mfa.gov.sg; processing fee: SGD 30 [*about ₹ 1,400*]).

EMBASSY ALERT

High Commission of India, Singapore: www.hcisingapore.gov.in

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's city guide to *Singapore* is an essential companion. When in the city, visit *BooksActually* for the widest range of books of, by and about Singapore (both fiction and non-fiction) in town (00-65-6222-9195; www.booksactually.com; 9, Yong Siak St; 11am–6pm Mon and Sun, 11am–9pm Tues–Sat; books from ₹ 300, knick-knacks from ₹ 200). Singapore's tourism website, too, is a valuable source of information (www.your.singapore.com).



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WAYS TO DO SINGAPORE...

	Mid-range	High-end
STAY	<p>'Funky' and 'experimental' perhaps best describe Wanderlust. Industrial glam dominates the lobby, and origami and pop-art inspire some of the rooms, with others done in Pantone hues. The rooms are cosy (read: not that spacious), but comfortable and so out-of-the-box that you're inspired to take some ideas and use them back home (00-65-6396-3322; www.wanderlusthotel.com, wlh-res@unlistedcollection.com; 2, Dickson Rd; from ₹ 7,450).</p>	<p>Naumi Hotel is a chic and modern home-away-from-home. It has text adorning the walls, and the service is attentive. Visit the small rooftop infinity pool for the great city views, if nothing else. The breakfast buffet is a great draw. What's also great is that there's always a treat coming—complimentary happy hours for beer and wine between 4.30pm and 6.30pm each day, an Apple TV in the room, a complimentary mini-bar with free refills of non-alcoholic drinks, yoga mats free for use inside the room, a little amenities pouch... (00-65-6403-6000; www.naumihotel.com; 41, Seah St; from ₹ 16,200 with breakfast).</p>
EAT	<p>If you manage to make your way through all the dining options in our list, try Fullerton Bay Hotel's Clifford Pier. Its reinterpretations of Asian specialties from the region have been exciting foodies, as has its take on the comfort food once sold by hawkers in the pier's early days.</p>	<p>It's hard to decide between dishes—wagyu beef <i>rendang</i>, crisp fried rolls with crabmeat and vegetables, or a version of rickshaw noodles (handmade flat noodles and simmered pork belly)... It would be a good idea to order several small portions and share. The live music and great views over the water only add to the desire to linger, and, thankfully, the courses arrive very slowly, and let you drink the ambience in (00-65-6597-5266; www.fullertonbayhotel.com; 80, Collyer Quay; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 1,000).</p>
	<p>Fancy a curry?</p> <p>Table by Rang Mahal offers North Indian and coastal food the locals swear by. Think vegetable biryani, chicken <i>tikka masala</i>, Kashmiri <i>rogan josh</i>, paneer <i>makhni</i>—all the usual suspects (00-65-6403-6005; www.rangmahal.com.sg, table@rangmahal.com.sg; Naumi Hotel, 41, Seah St; check website for timings; mains from ₹ 770).</p>	<p>Veg out</p> <p>The all-vegetarian Komala Vilas Restaurant in the heart of Little India more than delivers, with great <i>dosas</i>, <i>kofta</i> curry and <i>kadai</i> vegetables (00-65-6293-6980; www.komalavilas.com.sg, komala@singnet.com.sg; 76–78, Serangoon Rd, Little India; 7am–10.30pm; mains from ₹ 150).</p>
Currency	Good to Know	
SGD 1=₹ 48	<p>When travelling in Singapore, it's a good idea to wear sunscreen and light, breathable clothing.</p> <p>For a quick overview of the city or some deeper insights into the changes that the city has undergone, visit the Singapore City Gallery.</p>	<p>The made-to-scale model of the city—here Orchard Road, there Kampong Glam, everywhere the river-river—provides orientation and perspective. (00-65-6321-8321; www.uragov.sg; 45, Maxwell Rd, The URA Centre; 9am–5pm Mon–Sat; free).</p>

CLICK ON THE LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE!



SEPTEMBER 2015

Mini Guides



FROM YOUR
MAGAZINE
TO YOUR
POCKET...



1

TEAR the guide
out along the
perforations...

2

FOLD the guide
along the first
dotted lines...



3

FOLD
again to
make a handy,
pocket-size guide.



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MINI GUIDE SEPTEMBER 2015

Affordable Monaco

It may be the world's second-smallest country, but Monaco has plenty of glitz, glamour and attitude. While it's not cheap, you can still enjoy its delights without breaking the bank.

WHY GO?

To see another side of Monaco, minus casinos and the Grand Prix.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

While Monaco's opulent casinos, yacht-streaked harbour and world-renowned Grand Prix motor race draw crowds in hordes, its other delights are often ignored.

There is plenty to do in this French principality, from visiting a cliffside cacti garden and lounging at the open-air cinema to indulging in street food. The best part? You can do all this without burning a hole in your wallet!



Left: Le Rocher seen from the Jardin Exotique

Right: Monaco first decided to allow gambling in the 1850s, after the towns of Menton and Roquebrune had broken away, leaving the rest of Monaco as the poorest country in Europe

Eating and drinking

STREET EATS 1

Find inexpensive specialties such as *socca* (chickpea flour pancakes), *barbagian* (chard and cheese pastries) and *pan-bagnat* (a wheat-bread sandwich stuffed with Salade Niçoise) in street or market stalls around the old town. The Casino supermarket is also a handy, central option, with a street-side bakery and pizzeria (00-377-93305678; 17, Boulevard Albert 1er; 8.30am – 12am Mon – Sat, 9am – 9pm Sun; pizza slices from ₹200).



Pan-bagnat – in many ways, a Salade Niçoise in a loaf of bread

TIP TOP 2

This spot on the Formula One Grand Prix street circuit near the Monte Carlo Casino is where Monégasques gather all night long for pizza, pasta and gossip – a nice place to know if you're feeling hungry after a night out or are on a budget and crave simple dishes such as steak, roast chicken or calamari (00-377-93-50-69-13; www.facebook.com/TipTopMonaco; 11, Avenue des Spélugues; 10am – 6am; pizza from ₹900, mains from ₹975).

FLASHMAN 3

Located close to the popular Monte Carlo Casino, this retro American diner-style decor with fluorescent lights and a chrome counter can only be described as funky. Expect the likes of burgers and *entrecôte* on the menu, and reasonably priced drinks. There's also live music on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and the dress code is smart casual (00-377-93-30-09-03; www.facebook.com/flashmanMontecarlo; 7, Ave Princesse Alice; 8am – 6am Mon – Sat; pizza from ₹750, mains from ₹1,050).

Sights

CATHEDRALE DE MONACO 4

Join the crowd that walks past the graves of Monaco's 20th-century power couple, Prince Rainier III and Princess Grace, located inside the choir of the principality's cathedral – a white stone construction in reinvented Romanesque-Byzantine style (00-377-93-30-87-70; www.cathedrale.mc; Ave Saint-Martin; 8am – 7pm May – Sep, 8.30am – 6pm Oct – Apr; free).



Monaco upgraded its parish church to a cathedral in 1875

LE ROCHER 5

Le Rocher sits atop a pistol-shaped rock. It's this strategic location overlooking the sea that became the stronghold of the Grimaldi dynasty. Built as a fortress in the 13th century, the palace is now their private residence – the changing of the guard takes place every day at 11.55am. Le Rocher is the only part of Monaco to have retained small, winding medieval lanes. To access it, walk up the Rampe Major from Place d'Armes in the Condamine area.

JARDIN EXOTIQUE 6

This cliffside garden is home to hundreds of cacti and succulent species, from tennis ball-sized echinocereus to giant African candelabras. There are superb views of the principality, and your ticket includes a guided tour around the Grotte de l'Observatoire – a network of stalactite-rich caves and an important prehistoric site (00-377-93-15-29-80; www.jardin-exotique.mc; 62, Boulevard du Jardin Exotique; 9am – dusk; ₹520).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Affordable Monaco

Getting around



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Essentials

GETTING THERE

Fly to Nice's **Cote d'Azur Airport** with Air France, Swiss International Air, Jet Airways, Lufthansa and Turkish Airlines from Mumbai and New Delhi (return fares from ₹ 44,700). From here, Monaco's barely 30km away. Take Bus 110 from the airport (₹ 1,400 one-way) or a train from Nice Ville station to Monte Carlo (en.voyages-sncf.com; ₹ 270 one way).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Spring (April) and autumn (Sept-Oct) are the best times to go, when the weather is pleasant and room rates not too exorbitant. The F1 Grand Prix is held every May.

Summer thrills

OPEN-AIR CINEMA 7

The open-air cinema at the foot of Le Rocher shows crowd-pleasing blockbusters, mostly in English, every night from June 19 to September; there are no reservations. Just sit back in your armchair and try not to be too distracted by the glorious views overlooking the sea (www.cinema2monaco.com; Ave de la Quarantaine; tickets: ₹ 750).

FIREWORKS 8

From July through August, the port area is home to the **International Fireworks Festival**, a showdown of pyrotechnic expertise. Each show lasts around 20 minutes and the winner gets to organise the fireworks on November 18, the eve of the national holiday. Quai Albert 1er and Avenue d'Ostende are good spots to watch the show (www.monaco-feuxd'artifice.mc; free).

SWIMMING 9

Monaco's beaches are not the best in the Riviera but there are a couple of nice (and free) options. **Esplanade Stefano**



Fireworks light up the night sky behind the Place du Casino

Casiraghi is a concrete solarium near the open-air cinema, while the **Plage du Larvotto** is a sandy option at the northeast end. For an Olympic-sized sea-water pool, head to the Stade Nautique Rainier III (Quai Albert 1er; 9am – 6pm May – Oct; from ₹ 225).

Visa

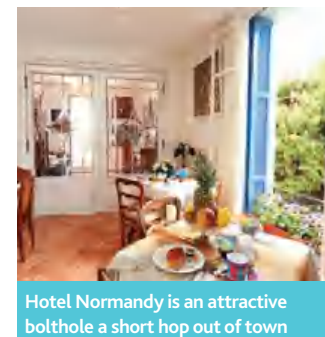
A Schengen visa valid for France is eligible for entry to Monaco, too. Apply for a tourist visa through VFS (www.vfs-france.co.in). It costs ₹ 4,255 and takes around two working days to process.

Sleep

There's no such thing as a budget hotel in Monaco but **Hotel Normandy 10** is just 1.6km away in Cap d'Ail, near a bus stop with services to Monaco. It's run by a family of artists, which shows in its original modern artworks. Some rooms come with a view of the sea (00-33-93-78-77-77; www.hotelnormandy.no, hotel.normandy@wanadoo.fr; 6, Allée des Orangers; from ₹ 5,460).

Miramar 11, a modern hotel with a rooftop-terrace restaurant, is a great option right by the port. The hotel, which is superbly located in the area around the Quai des Etats-Unis, was fully refurbished in 2014 (www.miramarmonaco.com; 1, Ave Président John Fitzgerald Kennedy; from ₹ 14,500).

Put preconceptions aside, for the **Novotel Monte Carlo 12** is no ordinary chain hotel. Rooms are bright and spacious, and the pool is open June to September (00-377-99998300; www.novotel.com, H5275@accor.com; 16, Boulevard Princesse Charlotte; from ₹ 16,500).



Hotel Normandy is an attractive bolthole a short hop out of town

Fancy a curry?

New Indien Restaurant has on its menu an array of *desi* starters. It also serves a wide range of sides – from chicken *dhansak* to *rogan ghosh* – to be mopped up with naans or rice (00-33-4-93-78-17-89; www.newindien.com/en; 9, Boulevard de la République, Beausoleil; 11.30am – 1.30pm and 6.30pm – 10.30pm; mains from ₹ 500).

Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Paris: ambinde.fr

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

COMPILED BY NATALIE MILLMAN. WITH INPUTS FROM EMILIE FILOU AND ALISHA WADIA. PHOTOGRAPHS: HEHIS/ALAMY, JOHANNA HUBER/SME/4CORNERS, ERIC NATHAN/ALAMY, NORBERT SCANELLA/ALAMY, DANIEL VALLA FRPS/ALAMY. CURRENCY: 1 EURO = ₹ 70 AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT

The call of the jungle sounds loud in this unassuming Indian state. When it comes to wildlife, Gujarat is a whole different animal. Have your fill of encounters of the wild kind in Gujarat, where animals abound and the forest beckons.

WHY GO?

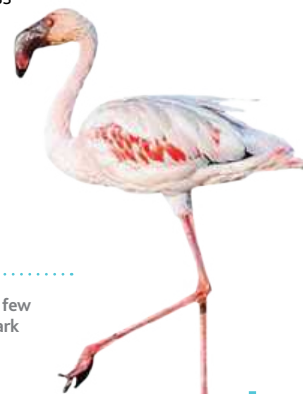
Gujarat is one of those mixed-bag sort of places that has everything you could possibly want in terms of habitat, and then some. You'll find dry deciduous forests, grasslands, wetlands and marine ecosystems all in the same state.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Track the Asiatic lion in Gir, follow a wild ass over the moonlike landscape of the Rann of Kutch, catch a glimpse of the rare great Indian bustard at a bird reserve, or marvel at the rare sighting of the four-horned antelope. And, if that's not enough, the good folk of Gujarat have also thrown in sightings of the endangered blackbuck for your viewing pleasure.

Left: Velavadar Blackbuck National Park is one of the few grasslands in the country to be declared a national park

Right: Go to Porbandar Bird Sanctuary to get your fill of flamingoes



MINI GUIDE SEPTEMBER 2015

Wildlife in Gujarat

See & Do

BEST FOR LIONS 1

The harsh, thorny landscape of **Gir National Park** makes an ideal home for the Asiatic lion. This former royal hunting ground is home to over 400 lions and leopards, spotted deer, sambar, chousingha, pangolin, hyenas and sloth bears (00-91-2877-285541; www.girlion.in; safaris: 6am–9am, 9am–12pm, 3pm–6pm; entry permits: ₹800/six people Mon–Fri, ₹1,000/six people Sat–Sun, guide: ₹200, jeep: ₹1,200; closed from Jun 16–Oct 15).

BEST FOR BLACK BUCK 2

The **Velavadar Blackbuck National Park**, all dry grass and earthy colours, is home to the endangered blackbuck, also known as the Indian antelope. Stay on for a few days and you might be lucky enough to spot the endangered Indian grey wolf, as well as the lesser florican (Forest office: 00-91-278-2920222; www.theblackbucklodge.com, check website for latest information; Blackbuck Lodge also organises safaris [see Where to Stay]).



The Marine National Park gives you a chance to get close to sea life

BEST FOR MARINE LIFE 3

The **Marine National Park**, along Jamnagar's coast off the Gulf of Kutch, is made up of about 42 islands. At low tide from mid-October to May, you can drive to Narara Island, 60km from Jamnagar town, to walk among coral and sea creatures. Look for neon sea slugs, starfish and octopus; you may even spot elusive dugongs and dolphins in the distance (From Oct only; Mr Mustak, who runs Hotel President, can organise a visit [see Where to stay]; ₹2,850 coral walk with guide and permits for a group of six).

BEST FOR BIRDS 4

Gujarat's arid **Banni Grasslands** form a belt on the southern edge of the salt flats of the Rann of Kutch. After the rains, you'll find about 200 migratory bird species here, including the grey hypocolius, little stint, desert wheatear and the endemic white-naped tit, as well as white morph-western reef egrets, rosy pelicans, and bustards (CEDO [see Where to stay]; 7am–6.30pm; ₹1,800 half-day [plus ₹1,000 with naturalist], ₹3,600 full day [plus ₹1,800 with naturalist]).

BEST FOR WILD ASSES 5

The ghostly *rann*, or salt marsh, is divided into two parts – the **Greater** and **Little Rann of Kutch**, and the region as a whole is a sanctuary – especially for the endangered wild ass, or *ghudkhar*, the only one of its kind in the world. Early mornings will reward you with beautiful sunrises and sightings of chinkara (Indian gazelle), desert foxes, jackals,



Expect to spot a virtual feast of local and migratory birds at Banni

caracals (African lynx), nilgais and striped hyenas (Deputy Conservator of Forests: 00-91-2832-250227).

BEST FOR FLAMINGOES 6

Porbandar has the **Porbandar Bird Sanctuary** in the heart of the city, where you can find flamingoes and other migratory birds. Seeing the flamingoes, even if it is from a distance, is still exciting (Assistant Conservator of Forests: 00-91-286-2242551; near Chaupati; sunrise–sunset).

TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

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Wildlife in Gujarat

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Essentials

GETTING THERE

Closest airports and railheads:

Gir National Park: Diu Airport (81km), Porbandar Airport (173km)

Marine National Park, Jamnagar: Jamnagar Airport is in town, Ahmedabad Airport is 302km away
Velavadar Blackbuck National Park: Bhavnagar (65km)

CEDO Birding: Bhuj (60km)

Rann of Kutch: Bhuj (96km)

Porbandar Bird Sanctuary: Porbandar has an airport.

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

November to March is a good time to catch all the wildlife, while you can see the lions and blackbuck till June.

Sleep & Eat

The rooms at **Hotel President** 7 in Jamnagar are simple, but the hotel is in the city centre and the manager, Mustak Mepani, is the man to arrange a trip to the Marine National Park on Narara Island (00-91-288-2557491; www.hotelpresident.in, info@hotelpresident.in; Teen Batti; from ₹1,800).

The Lords Eco 8 Inn is in the heart of Porbandar and makes for a great base for your birding expeditions (00-91-286-253300; www.lordshotels.com, leip@lordshotels.com; near Circuit House, Chaupati; ₹3,055 with breakfast).

Centre for Desert and Ocean (CEDO) 9 is a simple, substantial homestay that offers the bare necessities, but has clean bathrooms. Run by conservation enthusiast Jugal Tiwari, the place is a mecca for ornithologists (00-91-9825248135, 00-91-2835-221284; www.cedobirding.com; Moti Virani, Nakhtranua, Kutch; ₹3,500 with meals).

Run by owner Dhanraj Mallik and his wife, **Desert Coursers** 10 offers wildlife and cultural tours of the Kutch region. Accommodation



The CEDO homestay offers the bare necessities and clean loos

is basic but authentic – guests are put up in *koobas* (air-conditioned mud huts) designed to imitate the dwellings of the local Bajania tribe. Local food is part of the package here (00-91-2757-241333, 00-91-9426372113; www.desertcoursers.net; Camp Zainabad, District Surendranagar; ₹4,000 with all meals and one safari).

An easy 2km from the lake, **Green Mango Resort** 11 is a convenient option if you plan to go on early-morning bird-watching tours. The rooms are basic but neat (00-91-79-2644-0626, 09714127002; www.greenmangoresort.com;

www.greenmangoresort.com; Nal Sarovar City, Aniyari Village; ₹5,000 with all meals).

The Fern Gir Forest Resort 12 offers eco-friendly facilities. Choose from tents, cottages, villas and suites. The hotel has a pool and is on the edge of the sanctuary so you're never far from the action (00-91-287-7285999; www.fernhotels.com/gir-hotels/fern-gir.php, crs@fernhotels.com; Sasan Gir, Dist Junagadh; from ₹8,000 for tent with all meals).

Perhaps the best thing about **The Blackbuck Lodge** 13 is its proximity to the national park. The resort offers comfortable luxury amid an untamed landscape. Rooms have verandahs on which you can sip your coffee while you watch the park's majestic blackbuck (00-91-815-4973478; www.theblackbucklodge.com, reservations@theblackbucklodge.com; Velavadar National Park, Dist Bhavnagar, Bhal, Saurashtra; April 1 to Sept 30: ₹9,500 with meals for one; Oct 1 to Mar 31: ₹14,500 plus taxes, all meals included).



Blackbuck Lodge is sited close to Velavadar Blackbuck National Park

GOOD TO KNOW

Another great option for birding is the **Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary** 14, outside Ahmedabad. The Nalsarovar Lake is probably India's largest bird sanctuary and attracts many species of migratory birds from around the world (Tourism Corporation of Gujarat: 00-91-9725403286; 60km from Ahmedabad, Sanand; 6am – 5.30pm; ₹85).

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com


MINI GUIDE SEPTEMBER 2015

Chiang Mai, Thailand

Chiang Mai in northern Thailand is a land steeped in history. Having been ruled by Lanna kings in the past, it is home to some splendid temples. But the place has more to it: a beautiful landscape, even better food, and amazing people.

WHY GO?

To leave behind bustling Bangkok and explore a slower-paced version of Thailand.

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

Chiang Mai is set against lush hills draped in virgin forest. Soak in the land's culture and history, dating back to the Lanna Kingdom, and dig into some brilliant food while you're at it. Don't forget to throw in some adventure for good measure!

Left: Monks walk past Wat Phra Singh, Chiang Mai's most revered temple

Right: You will find sculptures of various animals 'guarding' the temples in Chiang Mai



See

WAT PHRA THAT DOI SUTHEP 1

Take a *songthaew* (red truck taxi) up to Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, a glinting gem of a temple that sits pretty atop a mountain. Getting to the top involves climbing 306 thigh-crushing steps, but the view when you get there is worth all the pain. Once there, partake in a 'monk chat' – you can interact with prep school-age monks and, in turn, help them improve their English (*Th Huay Kaew, Doi Suthep*; 6am – 6pm; entry: ₹55, plus ₹37 if you take the tram instead of climbing the stairs).

CHIANG MAI ZOO AND AQUARIUM 2

The Chiang Mai Zoo, situated on the foothills of Doi Suthep, is home to koalas, pandas, a rhino, penguins and other fauna. The recent addition of an aquarium and a snow dome make it a worthwhile day out (www.chiangmaizoo.com; 100, *Th Huay Kaew*; 8am – 4.30pm; entry: ₹274 adult, ₹130 child, extra to enter snow dome or see pandas).



The golden *chedi* (pagoda) at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep

DOKMAI GARDEN 3

Open only from January to June, this private botanical garden is worth paying a visit to. Beautifully maintained, it houses native plants with signboards providing their scientific names and cultural applications. Dokmai is also home to species of endangered orchids as it works with Thailand's Orchid Ark, a conservation programme. You can either opt for a guided tour, offering in-depth information, or make your own way around (00-66-8-7187-5787; *Hang Dong*; entry: ₹550, tour from ₹2,200).

Do

ZIPLINE IN MAE RIM 4

Get strapped in and ready for some adrenaline-pumping ziplining in Mae Rim, an hour's drive from the city. Eagle Track Zipline Tours offers three packages – Bronze (₹2,950), Silver (₹3,500), and Gold (₹4,400). Enjoy the view as you zip through the jungle, and test your balancing skills as you try the 'flying skateboard' – this is a half day's worth of fun (00-66-85-722-9090; www.eagletrackchiangmai.com, info@eagletrackchiangmai.com; 41/1, *Maeram, Mae Rim*; 8am – 4pm).

EXPLORE THE NIGHT BAZAAR 5

You can't leave Chiang Mai without experiencing the sights and sounds of its night bazaar. Vendors set up shop along the street, displaying a plethora of unique wares that you would be hard pressed to find in Bangkok. Don't be afraid to bargain – it is expected, and will only make your visit that much more enjoyable (*Th Chang Khlan*; 7pm – 12am).



You can play with and bathe the elephants at TECC

MEET ELEPHANTS 6

Spend a day at the **Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC)** and learn how these magnificent creatures are rehabilitated. Join in with feeding, bathing and riding an elephant. Book in advance (00-66-5482-9333; www.thaielephant.org/en/; 28 – 29, *Lampang-Chiang Mai Highway, Hang Chat*; show timings: 10am, 11am, and 1.30pm; bathing: 9.40am, 1.10pm; elephant show: ₹400 adult, ₹200 child, riding ₹900/half hour).

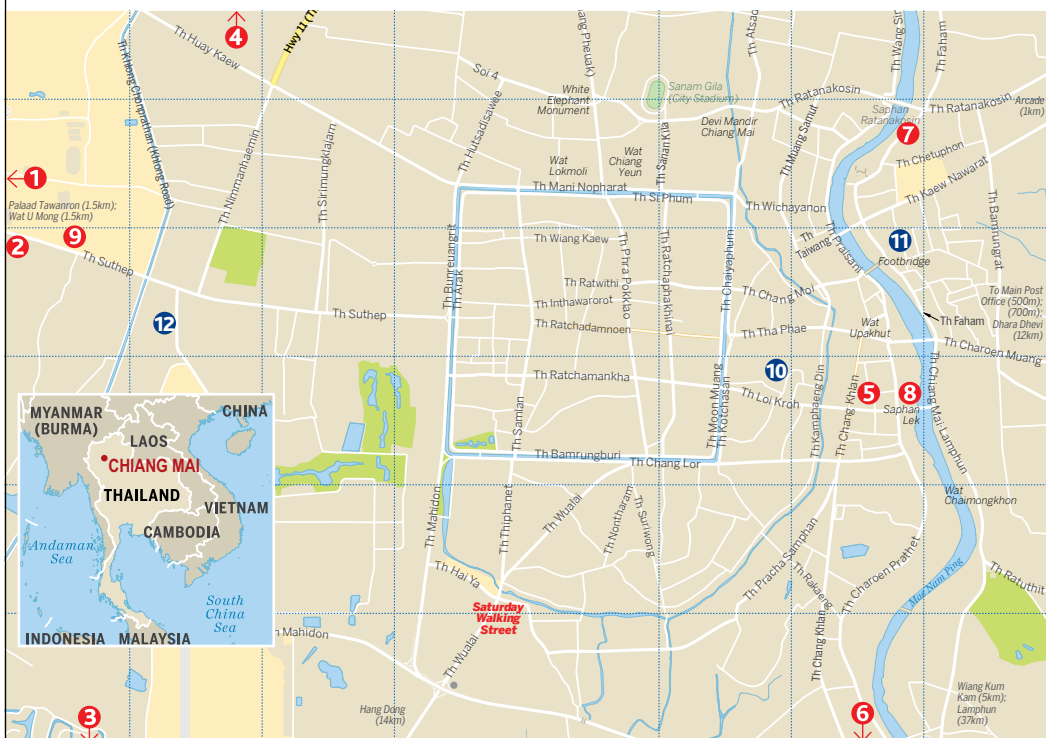
TURN OVER FOR MAP AND NUMBER LOCATIONS

MINI GUIDE

Chiang Mai, Thailand

Getting around

See Eat & drink Sleep



Essentials

GETTING THERE

Chiang Mai Airport is located a stone's throw away from the old city and is the only airport here. Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways and Air India fly from Mumbai and New Delhi, with a stopover in Bangkok (return fares from ₹26,000).

THE COST



DIFFICULTY OF TRAVEL



WHEN TO GO

Winter (Nov – Feb) is when Chiang Mai is at its most pleasant, with low humidity levels, no rainfall, and warm days and cool nights.

Eat & drink

KHAO SOI LAM DUAN 7

Indulging in a bowl (or many) of *khao soi* is the only way to deem your Chiang Mai experience complete. Northern Thailand's de facto signature dish, the thick, curry-like noodle soup is tough not to love, and Khao Soi Lam Duan notably makes the best version of the delicacy (00-66-5324-3519; 352/ 22 Charoen Rat Rd, Chang Phueak; 8am – 5pm; khao soi: ₹100).



Khao soi is considered to be Chiang Mai's signature dish

BUS BAR 8

Walk over to the Iron Bridge, beside which you will find a very well-kept secret. Frequented by both locals and expats, Bus Bar is literally a converted double-decker bus on which you can have your fill of chilled beers and heady cocktails, all while taking in the view of the serene Ping River (Th Charoen Prathet; 5pm – 12am; drinks from ₹200).

MALIN PLAZA 9

Malin Plaza houses several dozen Thai, Japanese and Korean food stalls. We've heard that hungry

students and locals throng the place the minute the stalls open. Sample the sushi and the Peking-style duck with fluffy pancakes (00-66-53-892111; 99/ 30, Moo 1, Th Huay Kaew, T Changphueak, opp Chiang Mai University; opens daily at 6pm).

Visa

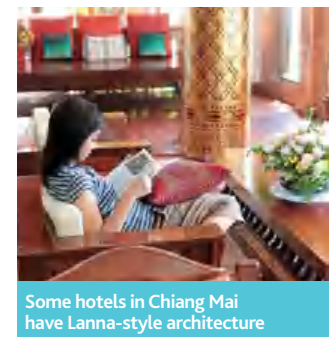
Indians can get a visa on arrival in Thailand for ₹1,900 for a stay of up to 15 days. You need to show a valid passport, confirmed return ticket and a passport-sized photo (www.thaiemb.org.in).

Sleep

Situated close to the night bazaar, **Mandala House 10** makes for a wonderful budget stay option. The rooms seem almost princely for the price tag, and come with hardwood flooring, big beds and desks, and free wi-fi (00-66-5327-2488; 71, Thapae Rd, Lane 4; from ₹1,500).

Sakorn Residence & Hotel 11 comes with spacious rooms and amenities. The hotel includes an outdoor pool, a garden, and even a gym. The hotel's close to numerous dining and nightlife venues (00-66-53-260-988/ 989; www.sakornresidence.com; 2/ 2-3, Nha Watkate Rd, Soi 1, T Watgate; from ₹2,200 with breakfast).

Located in the chic locality of Nimmanhaemin, **Kantary Hills Chiang Mai 12** gives you easy access to the best shopping and entertainment areas. The property offers the luxury of a five-star hotel with the comfort of a service apartment (00-66-53-22-2111/ 00-66-53-40-0877; www.kantarygroup.com; 44, 44/ 1-2, Nimmanhaemin Rd, Soi 12, Suthep; from ₹5,900 with breakfast).



Some hotels in Chiang Mai have Lanna-style architecture

Fancy a curry?

New Delhi serves up some of Chiang Mai's best Indian food – lots of complex flavours without any of the added grease. The restaurant specialises in *handi* dishes, among other north Indian fare (00-66-83-573-2692; 46/ 32, A, Ratchawithe Rd, Siriphoom, near Irish Pub, Mon Mueng; 11am – 10pm; mains from ₹300).

Embassy Alert

Embassy of India, Bangkok: indianembassy.in.th

For more details, log on to lonelyplanet.com

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